



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

20 Years After 9/11: The State of the Transportation Security Administration

September 29, 2021

Twenty years ago, on the morning of September 11th, the United States suffered the most devastating targeted attack in our history. Thousands of lives were lost, and many more were changed forever. In the weeks, months, and years that followed, the federal government engaged in a massive effort to reshape our security efforts and respond to new global threats. Most importantly for today's hearing, it was clear that federal authorities needed to be responsible for safeguarding our Nation's transportation system. And so, the Transportation Security Administration was born.

In its 20-year history, TSA has had seven Senate-confirmed Administrators. Four of them are with us today. Together, they represent the majority of the history of TSA, and they can speak to the incredible changes and growth the agency has undergone in the past two decades. When TSA began amid an uncertain threat picture, a rapid response required a "one-size fits all" approach to security measures, primarily using simple metal detectors and X-ray machines.

Over the years, TSA has responded to evolving terrorist tactics to advance its approach to screening and vetting. Today, TSA utilizes modern technologies such as Advanced Imaging Technology and Computed Tomography machines to detect a range of non-metallic weapons. TSA has developed a sophisticated, risk-based security approach leveraging intelligence, passenger vetting, and trusted traveler programs to focus limited resources on the most pressing threats. TSA must continue to evolve because we are continually facing new kinds of threats.

Today, threats are arising not just from violent terrorist groups, but from lone wolf actors, cyber criminals, public health emergencies, and unruly passengers. We have also seen threats expand from a focus on passenger aircraft to include other transportation modes and assets, such as air cargo, mass transit, freight and passenger rail, and pipelines. Collectively, these threats challenge the limits of TSA's authorities and resources, and Congress must ensure TSA remains prepared to execute its critical security mission.

I am eager to hear about the changes TSA has undergone to meet these threats and allow Americans to travel securely throughout the ongoing global pandemic. Unfortunately, even with all the modern improvements TSA has made, some issues have remained stagnant. The agency has struggled throughout its history to create a well-compensated, empowered, and fulfilled workforce. I am happy to see the Biden Administration taking steps to improve the situation.

On Monday, Administrator Pekoske announced a new Memorandum of Agreement with the Merit Systems Protection Board, or MSPB, under which the MSPB has agreed to review adverse action appeals from frontline officers. This action responds to longstanding calls for a fair, third-party disciplinary appeals process for the TSA workforce. I commend Administrator Pekoske, Secretary Mayorkas, and the Biden Administration for taking this important step. Still, a change in the law and significant funding will be needed to provide TSA workers with the workplace rights and the competitive pay they deserve.

To that end, I look forward to continuing to advance my bill, the Rights for the TSA Workforce Act of 2021, which this Committee marked up in July. Before I close, I also must note that, as Chairman, I strive to bring diverse witness panels before the Committee. Although there has been some diversity among TSA leadership over the years, only white, male Administrators have ever been confirmed by the Senate to lead the Transportation Security Administration. I hope TSA will increase the diversity of its leadership, both for its workforce as well as the American people.

As we look ahead, the successes—as well as the missteps—of the past two decades will help guide our mission to provide Americans with a safe, efficient, and secure transportation system. I look forward to reflecting on those issues today.

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