



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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

Markup of: H.R. 903, 2915, 4426, 4089, 4094, 4363, 4209, 4611, 4691, 4682
July 28, 2021

Today, we consider ten important measures. This is also the Committee's first hybrid mark-up since the COVID health emergency. I appreciate participation by Members here with us today in-person and here virtually. Most of the measures to be considered today have broad, bipartisan support. Three bills are targeted at enhancing supply chain security.

The Committee's Vice Chair, Mr. Torres, has a bill to improve how DHS manages supply chain risk associated with the software it buys. In light of recent cyberattacks, the approach taken in the DHS Software Supply Chain Risk Management Act is on point. I am also pleased that legislation Mr. Correa has worked on for years to enhance supply chain security of DHS uniforms is on the agenda. Enactment of H.R. 2915 will provide frontline personnel with higher-quality "Made-in-America uniforms" at a time when we all have a renewed appreciation for the need for a strong U.S. industrial base. The last of the supply chain bills comes from my colleague from Mississippi, Mr. Guest. It seeks to prevent DHS from purchasing drones from China and other adversaries. In addition to these three measures we are considering:

Mr. Gottheimer's bill, the Darren Drake Act to reduce of risk of terrorist attacks using rental vehicles. It is named in honor of his constituent who died in such an attack, and I know this bill is close to his heart.

Mr. Langevin, a true leader on cybersecurity, has his bipartisan measure to improve cybersecurity in K-12 schools. On the theme of protecting children, we also have the Homeland Security for Children Act, as introduced by Mr. Payne, to ensure that all DHS components address the needs of children in their policies and practices.

Additionally, we are moving legislation to support DHS' efforts to prevent illicit cross-border tunnels and improve transparency regarding procurement opportunities.

Last but not least is a pair of TSA-related bills. First, there is a bill introduced by the Ranking Member, Mr. Katko that seeks to improve security at airports with direct flights to the U.S. I know this has been a longstanding interest for the Ranking Member and I am pleased to have worked with him to enhance baseline security protections to position this new initiative for success.

The other TSA bill on the agenda is a longstanding priority for me and many of you on this Committee: H.R. 903, the Rights for the TSA Workforce Act. Since the establishment of TSA, its workforce has been treated as second-class. Unlike almost all other Federal workers, the hard-working men and women of TSA do not receive the pay and workplace protections under Title 5. The negative effects on TSA are irrefutable. TSA suffers from low morale, high attrition, and injustice. Frontline TSOs are not only underpaid, but lack the ability to build a career path. Further Federal workers at TSA lack the collective bargaining rights and whistleblower protections that their colleagues elsewhere in government have. My bill fixes this once for all by simply applying Title 5 to the TSA workforce.

Last Congress, the House twice passed this measure. I am pleased that twelve Republican Members are cosponsors this time around, including two who serve on this Committee. Thank you Mr. Van Drew and Mr. Garbarino for your support. Unfortunately, last Congress, we had an Administration that did not want to work with us. This time around, we are fortunate to have President Biden in the White House. I have been heartened by the level of engagement by the Biden Administration on this issue, including Secretary Mayorkas' June directive to start moving towards providing Title 5 protections and benefits to the TSA workforce.

Ahead of today's markup, I understand that a number of amendments filed by my Republican colleagues. I appreciate their engagement on this legislation but while these amendments, on the surface, may appear to move the needle, they fall far short of the reform needed at TSA. I urge Members to take to heart what AFGE, which represents the screener workforce, encouraged us to do in a letter I received today. The Committee is urged to stay strong and reject amendment that "weaken [the bill's] intent to achieve fair pay, a fair opportunity and put an end to this failed, toxic system."

After two decades of TSA experiment—where it got authority to get creative in how it designed its personnel system—a temporary pay increase will not suffice, as proposed in one amendment. Neither will protecting some, but not all, workers, as another amendment does. TSA's workers should be treated the same as their colleagues elsewhere in government. Period.

I know there is concern about the cost and whether appropriations will come through. As an authorizer, I will commit to all of you and the TSA workforce that as this legislation advances, I will be actively engaging with the Biden Administration and appropriators to secure full funding for full adoption of Title 5. And I trust the bill's 219 bipartisan cosponsors will help advocate for funding with me.

Again, thank you to our Members for joining us today and, though we have some areas of disagreement, I appreciate the bipartisan approach that the Ranking Member has taken to get us to this day.

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