



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Taking to the Skies: TSA's Strategy for Addressing Increased Summer Travel

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For much of last year, the skies were empty. Vaccines were a distant dream, and at one point, it seemed airlines were on the brink of collapse. At the beginning of lockdown, there were days where TSA screened less than 100,000 passengers. In contrast, this month, TSA routinely screens over 2 million daily passengers. But unfortunately, our Nation's return to travel has not gone seamlessly. Long lines have returned at checkpoints, meaning TSA has had to fight for more talent in this competitive job market.

That fight for talent is hindered by the fact that TSA workers still do not receive the pay and protections afforded to other Federal workers—though I am glad to be working with the Biden Administration to fix that problem. TSOs work hard under normal conditions. But the combination of COVID-19 and a dramatic uptick in unruly passengers has made the job even more challenging. Across the country, dozens of TSOs have been physically assaulted in recent months. Passengers have pushed and shoved officers, and in some cases, passengers have literally bitten TSOs.

Not only that, but the rate of firearms found at TSA checkpoints doubled last year. Consistently, over 80% of firearms found are loaded. Passengers must leave their firearms at home or follow the proper procedures for checking them, as bringing them to the checkpoint creates disruptions that could prove dangerous. Needless to say, this is a concerning convergence of trends.

There has also been a significant spike in disruptive passengers in the sky, as flight attendants have been assaulted or harassed with regularity. All too often, these assaults occur simply because a crewmember was doing their job and seeking to enforce commonsense mask policies designed to protect fliers from COVID-19. Although the public is most familiar with TSA's on-the-ground responsibilities, Federal Air Marshals play an essential role in aviation security once passengers get on board. We must ensure flight crews have the training and Federal support they need to confront this uptick in assaults. It is imperative that the entire TSA enterprise has a strategy for addressing the challenges by increased travel and unruly passengers.

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