



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Chairman Lou Correa (D-CA)

### *Climbing Again: Stakeholder Views on Resuming Air Travel in the COVID-19 Era* June 18, 2020

We are here to discuss proposals for how to restore our nation's aviation system that has been devastated by COVID-19. In recent months, we have seen passenger volume plummet to as low as 5 percent. Although passenger volumes has increased to 15 to 20 percent, we are a long way from where we were last year. This pandemic is unprecedented.

Still, it is the lack of Federal leadership and interagency coordination that I find particularly concerning. How can we protect our frontline aviation workers and passengers if the consultation and coordination is not there?

That is why Chairman Thompson and I recently sent a letter with the leadership on the Transportation Committee to the heads of DHS and DOT calling for an Interagency Task Force to take a holistic approach to supporting our nation's aviation industry.

I am very concerned about the different requirements for masks, temperature checks, and health assessments across the aviation system. This creates uncertainty for the traveling public and can increase the health risks to both passengers and aviation workers. Following and trusting the expertise and recommendations of trusted public health officials must be the way to go. Science and facts must inform future government and industry action.

Our decisions, ultimately, affect millions of travelers and nearly 11 million people whose jobs depend on a healthy aviation sector. Among the most publicized CDC guidelines are "social distancing" measures. They were most visible when "stay at home" orders were issued across this country and have been credited for helping to slow the spread of this deadly virus.

Today, social distancing measures are visible at security checkpoints and at boarding gates. However, onboard aircraft, different images have emerged. We have seen social media posts of crowded aircraft, full of unmasked passengers. Americans were rightfully surprised and troubled to see passengers forced to travel in those conditions when, by all accounts, the demand for travel was fairly limited. Even now, we hear from airlines that limiting passenger load factors or limiting middle seats is not necessary.

An unfortunate reality of this moment is that we are forced to address this crisis during a perilous economic environment with limited resources. That is why we must make sure the measures we put in place are innovative and effective.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, who represent different parts of the industry and have varying perspectives on temperature checks, health assessments, health questionnaires, and contact tracing. The complexities of air travel in the COVID-19 era have also sparked an interest in technological solutions. Reducing contact between frontline employees and passengers is important to limit the transmission of the virus. Equally important is making sure the medicine is not worse than the disease.

The impact of these technologies and procedures on the privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties of the flying public must be communicated clearly. Further, any such invasive protocol like temperature checks should be subject to notice and comment by the public before widespread deployment.

For example, I understand that TSA is considering installing cameras with facial recognition software on TSA's Credential Authentication Technology or "CAT" machines that are in use at some TSA security checkpoints. Before the rollout of facial recognition biometric technology into airports, TSA and DHS have a lot of work to do. This Committee has already done a great deal of oversight on this issue.

There are still many concerns over data collection, data protection, and use of public's identity data. It is not in anyone's interest to see the Department push out new facial recognition technology without having the necessary protections in place.

Another technology under consideration is "detection at range". These machines use thermal imaging technology to detect metal and non-metallic threats and can reduce the need for patdowns at security checkpoints. However, history reminds us that the last time TSA deployed imaging technology, specifically the Advanced Imaging Technology at checkpoints today, Congress had to step in.

Congress issued a deadline to stop the use of scanners that did not protect the passengers' privacy, which resulted in the avatar in use today. Ultimately, I am looking for solutions, and I want to hear from our aviation partners. The public has a right to an informed debate that highlights issues that must be identified and considered before sweeping decisions are made.

Last but not least, I want to hear from our stakeholders how they are protecting their frontline workforces. There is no aviation industry without its workforce. Keeping workers healthy and safe and supporting them during this pandemic will ensure that this industry and its employees make it through.

Our aviation industry is resilient but needs us all to work together to ensure the safety, security, and health of the public.

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