



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Field Hearing Statement of Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV)

Examining DHS' Efforts to Improve Processing for International Visitors

Las Vegas, Nevada

May 24, 2022

I am so pleased to have you all in my district to discuss the important work Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) are doing to encourage international travel to and from the U.S. while bolstering the security of aviation travel.

This field hearing is a great opportunity for our members to get a behind-the-scenes look at the exciting new security technologies these travel agencies are using to facilitate seamless processing. As we bounce back from the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we ensure no tourist or visitor is discouraged from traveling to our country because of processing delays or long wait times.

Despite low travel rates due to the pandemic, air travel is making a significant comeback, particularly as we approach the summer months. Visitation trajectories from March of this year are 50% above what they were in March 2021, bringing the number travelers and tourists to over three million in March of this year. Just last month, the Las Vegas Airport had nearly 191,000 international air passengers.

CBP officers ensure that international travelers coming into the U.S. are screened properly before enjoying the many attractions Las Vegas has to offer. In 2020, CBP introduced Simplified Arrival processing using biometric technology – a privacy protective, efficient, and secure way to utilize new technologies for enhanced screening. Initiatives like these are what will catapult our airport security efforts into the future while meeting increased travel demands. Unfortunately, as travel numbers spike, CBP still lacks the personnel needed to meet this demand, with a shortage of at least 900 CBP officers across ports of entry. CBP should do everything possible to strengthen its workforce by hiring more personnel and working to mitigate these shortfalls with automated technologies. We now have an optimistic traveler forecast as we move towards the next phase of this pandemic – let's take that opportunity to augment CBP capabilities and meet the need.

As the witnesses from our tourism authorities will tell you today, this positive trend is expected to increase. We must continue to support our travel agencies so that tourists come to our city with positive travel experiences, a sense of trust in our security processing, and a desire to come visit again. Here at Las Vegas Airport, we are proud to host the nation's only TSA Innovation Checkpoint, which features the latest upgrades in technology to improve security and the passenger screening experience. I understand Chairman Thompson was able to tour the Innovation Checkpoint yesterday and I hope some of you will be able to take a walk through before you head home back to your districts.

Since its establishment in 2019, the Innovation Checkpoint at Terminal 3 has allowed TSA employees to observe and evaluate new technologies in a real-time, lab-like environment. It includes four Automated Screening Lanes integrated with Computed Tomography scanners, allowing for uninterrupted screening of carry-on luggage. TSA is also testing a CT scan unit designed to recognize coding and divert bags that need follow-up screening. Given our diverse and varied passenger profile utilizing our airport, the

Innovation Checkpoint serves as the perfect opportunity to pilot new security technologies without sacrificing reliability or efficiency.

In the nine years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Las Vegas set a record for annual passenger volume, with 51.5 million travelers visiting our city in 2019 via the airport. In recognizing increasing demand, President Biden has laid out a Fiscal Year 2023 budget to improve TSA security capabilities and ensure employees are better paid, valued, and eligible for well-deserved benefits. I am pleased that the President's FY23 budget requests \$9.7 billion for TSA, a \$1.4 billion increase from last year's funding level. This number includes \$105 million for the Checkpoint Property Screening System program and \$19 million for On-Person Screening Algorithm Development to improve screening capabilities, intended to improve detection of threats in an ever-evolving landscape.

In Congress, I was proud to vote this month in favor of a TSA workforce bill which improves conditions, pay, and benefits for all 60,000 employees so that they feel empowered to do their job to keep air travel safe. Supporting this workforce is an essential part of the homeland security goals that this Committee has advocated for.

Thank you again to all of you for being here today.

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