

**Statement of the Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) as prepared
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security
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TSA’s scope of responsibility is broad and its challenge in securing transportation against terrorist attack is critical to the Nation’s overall homeland security efforts.

Over the last four years during my Chairmanship of this subcommittee, we evaluated cargo security on passenger planes, passenger and baggage screening technology and processes, security at foreign repair stations, general aviation security, the Registered Traveler program, and the administration of TSA’s programs for surface transportation security.

Mr. Chairman, I know from my early discussions with you, that we share the same commitment to securing our Nation’s transportation systems. To Administrator Pistole, I welcome you again to the Subcommittee, and I look forward to your testimony.

Since you were confirmed nearly eight months ago, you have been presented with a myriad of challenges, from explosives shipped from Yemen to enhanced pat down screenings at Thanksgiving, and through it all you have shown leadership and determination in trying to get it right in addressing threats and securing all transportation modes.

Recently, you have made two critical decisions that I must commend you for. First, I agree and support your decision not to expand the Screening Partnership Program for airports to “opt out” of using TSA screeners in order to contract with private screening firms. As we look to mitigating the current and future threats to aviation, let us not forget the past.

On that fateful day of September 11, 2001, four of the passenger screening checkpoints transited by the nineteen hijackers were operated by three different security firms contracted by air carriers at the three airports where the terrorists departed: Boston Logan, Newark Liberty and Washington Dulles.

Citing serious security vulnerabilities with this process Congress wisely decided to federalize the screening workforce, and this TSA workforce has subsequently played a critical role as one of the most important security layers for securing commercial aviation.

With consistent, intelligence-based administration of TSA’s screening programs, we have hardened aviation significantly against terrorist attack, and although TSA has managed the small group of SPP airports, including SFO in the District of our distinguished colleague from California, Ms. “Speer”, we must be careful not to institute a system of hodgepodge screening companies working at different airports across the Nation, and I appreciate you looking at this carefully.

I also commend your decision to extend collective bargaining rights to Transportation Security Officers. Now, just as it is with other security professionals at Customs and Border Protection and the Federal Protective Service, TSOs will have input on workplace and performance appraisal issues.

And just like with those two agencies and countless other law enforcement agencies across this Nation, this collective bargaining will in no way negatively impact security, but, in fact, will improve the morale and performance of our hardworking TSOs.

I know that the Chairman and I may disagree on some of these issues, but I also know that we have a great deal in common. We have already discussed taking a look at the attack on the Moscow Airport several weeks ago in order to assess lessons learned for U.S. airports, just as we assessed in the last Congress the events surrounding the Mumbai attacks on hotels, to examine best practices and lessons learned that the Department could use to further secure our domestic hotel industry.

The Chairman and I have also discussed the importance of continuing where we left off in the last Congress in focusing on securing mass transit and other surface modes of transportation. Again, recent history in Russia, Madrid and Spain have shown that surface transportation is a terrorist target, and we need to be prepared.