



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Terrorism and Transportation Security

February 10, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Terrorism and Transportation Security”:

“I would like to welcome Mr. Pistole to his first hearing this Congress. We have had several discussions over the past few months since his confirmation, and I can say that TSA is in very capable hands.

Administrator Pistole, let me start by commending you for your decision to grant collective bargaining rights to the Transportation Security Officers at TSA. As you know, I along with Representative Lowey and Ranking Member Jackson-Lee have been championing collective bargaining rights for TSOs for several years. As proven by the performance of other federal security officers, collective bargaining does not diminish our security.

In fact, as I have written to you and continue to believe, collective bargaining can improve workforce morale and productivity, and this will positively impact TSA in fulfilling its mission to secure our transportation systems. Too often, we have been inundated with TSO concerns regarding poor workplace conditions, vague and inconsistent performance appraisal processes and ineffective training programs and practices.

Further, my top concern continues to be affording TSOs the same benefits and personnel standards as other employees in the federal pay system, and I look forward to continuing to work with you as you implement this new collective bargaining framework, so that all of these key issues are addressed.

Mr. Chairman, last Congress, in our oversight activities of TSA’s programs, we held several hearings addressing critical transportation security issues.

I have taken particular interest in the deployment of Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) machines at our nation’s airports, and have urged TSA to implement privacy and efficiency safeguards to accompany the use of this technology.

I know you have heard these concerns, and I look forward to reviewing the new pilot program for the Automated Targeting Recognition software, currently being tested, which should reduce privacy concerns raised about the intrusive nature of the AIT images.

Once the testing of this new software to accompany the AIT machines is complete, I will call on the Department to conduct an updated Civil Liberties Impact Assessment on this new system.

And as I have said numerous times, millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent on this technology, and we need to be sure that it is deployed in a risk-based manner and that TSA personnel are sufficiently trained to harness this technology.

We have also had many conversations about TSA’s need to work collaboratively with other agencies and stakeholders. I hope you will continue to strengthen the agency’s relationships with stakeholders, particularly in the area of cargo security and cargo screening technology.

Lastly, but just as importantly, I would like to stress the importance of adequately addressing threats within surface transportation security. It is imperative that TSA share with Congress the shortcomings in resources available to address threats across surface and mass transit modes.

I look forward to learning more about the specific steps TSA has taken to focus resources towards surface and mass transit modes of transportation at today's hearing."

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