

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

February 7, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing on the Screening Partnership Program (SPP):

“It is my hope that some of the myths and rhetoric surrounding this program can be put to bed today. By this hearing title, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have implied that the current use of federal screeners impedes job growth.

There is no proof—in law or fact—for that assertion. The number of screeners at an airport is determined by an analysis of the risk, threat and volume at that airport. These factors will not change based on whether the screeners are private contractors or federal employees.

So the number of jobs will not change based on whether the screeners are public or private sector employees.

Under the Republican suggestion, the only thing that will change is whether the jobs will be public or private. We know that both types of screeners are effective and face challenges, follow the same rules and receive the same training. We also know that private screeners cost up to nine percent more than federal screeners. We know that public and private screeners can join unions. So the only real difference is cost.

What we do not know is why the Republicans seem to be willing to pay more for the same services or how doing so will create jobs. If the added cost to taxpayers fails to convince you that this program should not be expanded, consider that it takes us back to a model similar to the one in place on 9/11.

Administrator Pistole performed a full review of TSA policies and practices and determined that the SPP should not be expanded unless there was a clear and substantial advantage to doing so. Contrary to claims made at the time, the Administrator did not shut down the program. Rather, he set a reasonable standard for expansion. That standard was met last week by a low-risk seasonal airport in Montana and TSA approved their application.

TSA did so because the net impact was advantageous to the government. On the same day, TSA denied the applications of two airports because they failed to demonstrate an operational, security, or cost advantage over federalized screening operations.

Both of these decisions are perfectly logical. Regrettably, this hearing comes a day late and a dollar short for this Committee. Last week, the FAA Reauthorization Act was passed by the House and will soon be signed into law.

As described by Subcommittee Ranking Member Jackson Lee, that aviation safety bill contained a security provision within this committee’s sole jurisdiction altering the law controlling the SPP. In summarizing the provision, it amounts to a Congressional attempt to micromanage the SPP by stripping the Administrator of his discretion.

Without this Committee having held one hearing, markup or debate on the changes proposed, Homeland Security Members were denied a seat at the table by the Speaker when the provision went to Conference.

Chairman King and I sent a letter to the Speaker just two weeks ago requesting that jurisdiction over DHS be consolidated. Apparently, under this Republican Leadership, even when you have jurisdiction, you get left out.”

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