

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Transportation Security Committee on Homeland Security

Hearing “TSA’s Efforts to Fix Its Poor Customer Service Reputation and Become a Leaner, Smarter Agency”

June 7, 2012

I would like to take this moment to first welcome Administrator Pistole and acknowledge that this month marks your two-year anniversary at TSA. I thank you for your leadership and look forward to continuing our work with you.

Mr. Chairman I would like to thank you for holding this hearing with the Administrator. It is important for us to recognize the leadership of Mr. Pistole and to identify potential opportunities where TSA can do better.

However, the title of today’s hearing appears to address TSA as a one-dimensional organization. TSA is *our* transportation security agency, not just a call center or help desk at a department store.

I think we would be remiss if we did not recognize TSA’s growth and maturity since being established in the aftermath of 9/11. Let us ask ourselves, would the elimination of TSA, as proposed by a Republican member on this Committee during consideration of the Homeland Security Appropriations Act last night make us more secure?

I, and thankfully, the majority of my colleagues do not believe it would. Clearly we cannot ignore that TSA expands beyond our checkpoint screening operations and has successfully instituted security programs such as:

Secure Flight, which vets passengers against the No Fly list before boarding a plane;
Risk Based Screening, a shift on the passenger screening experience as TSA evolves and focuses more time on those individuals it knows the least about; and

The Transportation Security Grant Program, which requires TSA’s expertise on mass transit vulnerabilities and funding priorities across all high risk state and local jurisdictions.

These are just some examples of how TSA has established itself beyond just our checkpoint screening.

The national goal of ensuring a safe aviation environment can only be achieved through bipartisanship in the Legislative branch and cooperation between the Legislative branch and the Executive branch.

I look forward to hearing from the Administrator today and clarifying some of the points discussed earlier this year by TSA officials regarding the vetting of workers at airports, privatization of transportation security workers, the status of TSA’s repair station security rule, and the role and responsibilities for surface inspectors at TSA.

As well all know, TSA’s scope of responsibility is broad. Its mandate and its challenge is to secure all modes of transportation against terrorist attack.

Safeguarding our nation’s mass transit, railways, highways and aviation is a critical step to securing the Nation’s safety.

Mr. Chairman, as Members of this Subcommittee, it is our responsibility to ensure that we send a clear legislative message to Members of the House. We must do what authorizers are bound to do under the rules of this House: outline funding levels.

Without such guidance, funding for programs at TSA will be subject to the whims and impulse of others who may not share our commitment to the mission of this agency. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you on legislative initiatives that go to the House floor and provide adequate funding levels for TSA.