

Statement for the Record

**Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation Security**

A Decade After 9/11 Could American Flight Schools Still Unknowingly Be Training Terrorists?

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General Aviation accounts for about 54% of all civil aviation activity in the United States. According to GAO, general aviation is the source of 1.3 million jobs and contributes approximately \$100 billion to the U.S. economy. Because GA includes such a diverse array of operations, general aviation encompasses a wide spectrum of aircraft, personnel and pilots.

Today, GAO is releasing a report that outlines TSA' efforts to address GA security. I look forward to discussing GAO's findings today and identifying solutions to complex questions.

Today's hearing, however, appears to focus only on one aspect of General Aviation: the vetting of foreign nationals seeking to enroll in flight training school. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity note that the threat to GA expands beyond the vetting of foreign nationals enrolled in flight training programs.

A most recent example of this took place on February 2010, when a disgruntled individual flew his private one engine plane into an IRS building in Austin, Texas. This incident killed two people and hurt many innocent people who were caught up in the fire after the crash. General aviation encompasses aircraft of virtually every size that perform a wide variety of missions, from crop-dusting to large passenger charters.

Further, international inbound general aviation accounts for about 400 flights per day. Most – about 75% – are from Canada and Mexico, and the remainder are from a variety of countries.

Today, we will hear from TSA—and industry—about increased collaboration between TSA and industry and some of the concrete examples that point to enhanced security across the GA community because of these efforts.

I think today's hearing will lay important markers about general aviation security and how DHS can more efficiently harness its resources—particularly that of information sharing and access to accurate information in databases.

Today's hearing will also afford us the opportunity to learn more extensively about the steps taken by TSA and ICE to address the vulnerabilities identified by GAO. Since GAO's findings were released, TSA and ICE have embarked on key programmatic changes that enhance GA security:

First, TSA and ICE have formalized their cooperation. Second, TSA and ICE are in the midst of enhancing an extensive vetting project of all foreign nationals enrolled in flight schools, pilots and crew members, and personnel at repair stations. Finally, ICE and TSA have improved information sharing efforts that impact the mission and operations of both agencies in GA.

There is no doubt that GAO's report provided clarity to TSA and Congress on the vulnerabilities present in General Aviation. However, we cannot ignore that there is more to G-A security than just vetting foreign nationals. The Department's approach must continue to evolve to embrace a comprehensive analysis of risk.