

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****A Decade After 9/11 Could American Flight Schools Still Unknowingly Be Training Terrorists?***

July 18, 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 entitled “A Decade After 9/11 Could American Flight Schools Still Unknowingly Be Training Terrorists?”:

“The issue of General Aviation security has long been of great interest to the Democratic Members of this Committee. I am pleased the Subcommittee is turning its attention to this issue today. At the outset, I would like to thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today.

In particular, I would like to thank the Government Accountability Office for their diligent work on the report on general aviation security they are releasing today. GAO undertook this report as a result of a joint request by both the Chair and the Ranking members of the Full committee and the Subcommittee. We made the request because of our shared interests in identifying areas where TSA’s policies affecting a large segment of the aviation community are working and need increased attention.

Before focusing on the challenges highlighted by the report, I would like to commend TSA for enhancing its collaboration with the general aviation community. In passing legislation that I introduced this Congress to statutorily authorize the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, this Congress has indicated its desire that TSA and the General Aviation industry cooperate to improve the security of the General Aviation sector.

I look forward to hearing from both TSA and the stakeholders before us today on how increased collaboration has and will continue to enhance security. Turning to the challenges identified by GAO, TSA must answer for its shortfalls in identifying whether non-U.S. citizens obtaining flight training represent a threat.

We cannot allow loopholes exploited by the 9/11 hijackers to be exploited again. However, we cannot ignore that violent domestic extremist can also pose a threat to our aviation security.

The last individual to fly a plane into a building and kill innocent civilians in this country was not a foreign national or “Islamist extremist,” it was a United States citizen with an extremist and violent ideology regarding the Internal Revenue Service.

I look forward to hearing from TSA about the measures they have employed to ensure that such a scenario does not occur again and our current capacity to identify persons who may pose a threat.”

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