

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****TSA's Efforts to Advance Risk-Based Security: Stakeholder Perspectives***

April 11, 2013 (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 “TSA’s Efforts to Advance Risk-Based Security: Stakeholder Perspectives”:

“Since TSA’s policy change regarding the Prohibited Items List was announced, Members on both sides of the aisle have expressed deep frustration with TSA’s failure to formally engage the stakeholders impacted by the decision, such as flight attendants and the frontline workforce.

Two weeks ago, I, along with over 130 other Members of Congress wrote the TSA Administrator to express our concerns about the failure to formally consult stakeholders before implementing a policy change that will permit passengers to carry knives on a plane.

If anyone doubts the potential danger of small knives, I hope that Tuesday’s tragic events at Lone Star Community College will serve as a wakeup call.

Unfortunately, despite these tragic events, it is my understanding that the knives on a plane rule will take effect as planned.

In an effort to avoid such missteps by TSA in the future, I recently introduced the bipartisan “Aviation Security Stakeholder Participation Act of 2013.”

This legislation requires TSA to formally engage key stakeholders through the Aviation Security Advisory Committee when developing policies that impact millions of passengers and stakeholders.

Today, this Committee will demonstrate the value of consultation with those affected by the policy decisions that we in Congress and the Administration make.

I look forward to hearing from all of the witnesses we have here today.

I am particularly eager to hear from Mr. Borer, the General Counsel for the American Federation of Government Employees, regarding the impact TSA’s recent decision to remove knives from the Prohibited Items List will have on screeners and the direction they have received from TSA.

Regardless of the policy at issue, its implementation can only be successful if the frontline workforce has clear direction on how to carry it out.

I am also interested in hearing from the witnesses regarding their thoughts on TSA’s shift to a so called “risk-based” security model.

While the term “risk-based” sounds appealing at first glance, I believe we need to give a close examination to how TSA is defining what constitutes risk and have a serious discussion about the level of risk we are willing to accept.

Prior to 9/11, we accepted the risk of having passenger and baggage screening conducted by private security companies.

In the aftermath of that tragic day, Congress overwhelmingly supported federalizing the screener workforce in an effort to lessen the risk of another such tragedy occurring.

With time, however, I fear that memories of that day and the lessons learned have begun to fade, leading to calls for the massive, and even forced, transition back to a privatized screener workforce.

Last year, in their ongoing efforts to expand the use of contract screeners, critics of TSA placed language into the Conference Report for the FAA Authorization Act allowing subsidiaries of foreign-owned corporations to obtain contracts for screening at domestic commercial airports and stripping the Administrator of his discretion to approve or deny an airport's application to privatize its screeners through the Screening Partnership Program.

They did so without any public debate on the changes and without this Committee, the Committee of jurisdiction, having a single Member assigned as a Conferee.

The Government Accountability Office recently reported that TSA's evaluations of contract screeners are insufficient to determine how their performance compares with Federal screeners.

TSA has reported numerous security breaches, by contract screeners, including failure to detect prohibited items, improperly clearing passengers at SPP airports and mishandling sensitive security information.

In addition to concerns about performance, there are serious concerns about cost.

According to data provided by TSA, it cost taxpayers 46 percent more to use contract screeners at Rochester International Airport in 2012 than it would have cost to use a Federalized workforce.

In response to these concerns, I, along with Representatives Richmond and Lowey, introduced H.R. 1455, the "Contract Screener Reform and Accountability Act," yesterday.

This legislation will:

- Prohibit subsidiaries of foreign-owned corporations from obtaining contracts for screening services at domestic commercial airports;
- Require all security breaches at airports with contract screeners to be reported;
- Require training for the proper handling of sensitive information at SPP airports; and
- Mandate covert testing of contract screeners and impose penalties for compromising testing.

I am pleased that Senator Brown of Ohio has introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

I look forward to working with the Members of this Committee to fix the problems associated with the use of contract screeners prior to calling for their expanded use."

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