

Statement of Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (MS- 2)
Consideration of

Amendment to H.R. 2217 - Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act

June 5, 2013

My amendment does one simple thing: it stops TSA from continuing to waste taxpayer dollars on a program the agency has not scientifically validated or shown to be cost-effective.

Since 2007, TSA has spent approximately one billion dollars on its behavioral detection program—the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques or “*SPOT*” program.

Under this program, on an annual basis, TSA spends about 200 million dollars to deploy 2,800 Behavior Detection Officers or “*BDOs*” at airports around the country to observe passenger behaviors for signs that they present a terrorism risk to aviation.

While the goal of the program - preventing terrorists from boarding flights - is laudable, the program is, by any measure, fatally flawed.

Chief among those flaws is that TSA has not scientifically validated that BDOs can identify terrorists by observing behaviors.

Indeed, the Government Accountability Office has found that “known or suspected terrorists” have moved through screening on 23 different occasions in airports where BDOs were deployed. In fact, BDOs have never identified, apprehended, referred to law enforcement or prevented a terrorist from boarding an aircraft.

This is not surprising considering that there is no scientific basis for suggesting they should or would be able to do so.

As if it were not bad enough that TSA has spent almost one billion dollars on a program without scientific validation, yesterday, *The New York Times* reported that the DHS Inspector General found that TSA cannot ensure passengers at U.S. airports are screened objectively under the SPOT program; show that the program is cost-effective; or reasonably justify the program’s expansion.

Indeed, the IG found that the program does not have a strategic plan, financial plan, or even a comprehensive and uniform training program.

In light of the sequester and the resulting budget cuts, I, for one, see no justification for spending another dollar on a program that is wasteful and ineffective.

The time has come to stop TSA from squandering additional funds on this misguided effort.

I was surprised, that in these austere times, the Appropriations Committee provided funding for the program, especially when, in the report accompanying H.R. 2217, the Committee questioned the fundamentals for the program when it said that “there are outstanding questions remaining over the value of the program.”

We have an opportunity today to ensure we fund programs that are merit-worthy and effective, NOT programs whose value and effectiveness have not been established.

Further, we have the opportunity to ensure that the 200 million dollars saved by defunding this program are put to far better uses, such as expanding TSA’s PreCheck program so more individuals can receive expedited screening, reducing wait times at screening checkpoints, and bolstering surface transportation security.

Earlier today, the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee stated that we cannot afford to fund unproven and wasteful programs.

I could not agree more, that is why I am offering this amendment to cut off funding for TSA’s unproven and wasteful SPOT program.