

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Hearing “TSA’s SPOT Program and Initial Lessons From the LAX Shooting”

November 14, 2013

I want to give a special thanks to Administrator Pistole for your service and leadership in the wake of the tragic shooting at LAX on November 1st.

Yet again, a Committee is meeting on Capitol Hill to discuss a shooting by a lone wolf. Another in a seemingly endless series of tragic shootings that have separated husbands from wives, parents from children and friends from colleagues. From Aurora to Newtown to the Navy Yard, it seems that every week we are back in the Capitol, a Committee is holding a hearing to explore how and why a senseless act of gun violence occurred, garnering national headlines.

Rarely are there simple answers and rarely do we address the core issues that allow these events to occur time and time again. Nor do we examine all, or even more than a small sample, of the total number of incidents of gun violence that occur each day, week and month in our nation.

This time, we are meeting to explore the circumstances surrounding the targeted killing of a Transportation Security Officer. Gerardo Hernandez, the first TSA employee to be killed in the line of duty. But Officer Hernandez was more than that. He was, by all known accounts, a loving husband and father, loyal friend and dedicated federal employee. A man who, like so many other Transportation Security Officers, took pride in his job, defending our nation from those who seek to do us harm.

Despite a constant barrage of criticism from Members of Congress, the media, and a litany of bloggers who fancy themselves security experts from behind their computer screens, Officer Hernandez and his fellow TSOs continued to do their part to secure our nation, even during the shutdown, when political grandstanding put their paychecks in jeopardy. It is unclear whether there are any policies or procedures that can be put into place or dollars that can be spent to prevent what happened at LAX from happening again.

But in Washington, proposals for new policies will come fast and furiously. I would caution that we should guard against taking any steps prior to having a full understanding of the events that occurred at LAX and the impact policy changes would have on the nation. Maybe there are common sense steps that could be taken to improve coordination between local law enforcement agencies and TSA, such as ensuring they can communicate via radios during emergencies – this wasn’t the case at LAX on the day of the shooting.

But even common-sense fixes have potentially unintended consequences and costs associated with them.

Regarding cost, the Government Accountability Office has pointed Congress to a TSA program without scientific merit that the agency funds at over 200 million dollars per year. I am, of course, speaking of TSA’s SPOT program and GAO’s report released yesterday.

I, for one, needed no further convincing the SPOT program represents an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars. Indeed, I have proposed legislation to use the funds allocated to this program as an offset for student loans.

Hopefully, GAO’s report, along with the previous work of the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General, will help other Members come to the conclusion that TSA’s SPOT program is a failed experiment that no longer merits hundreds of millions of dollars in funds per year. Frankly, with resources scarce and Members looking for offsets anywhere they can find them, I cannot imagine how this program continues to garner Congressional support in the wake of GAO’s report.

To that end, I would encourage Administrator Pistole to include within his review of security procedures at checkpoints an assessment of how SPOT funds could be allocated to enhance and expand the use of security technologies and procedures that have been proven effective.