

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****TSA's SPOT Program and Initial Lessons From the LAX Shooting***

November 14, 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 SPOT Program and Initial Lessons From the LAX Shooting”:

“At the outset, I would like to join my colleagues in expressing condolences to Officer Hernandez’s wife, children, friends and family and to all of the employees of the Transportation Security Administration. Today, I will be joining Chairman McCaul, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Richmond, and Congresswoman Waters in introducing a resolution condemning the shooting at LAX and expressing condolences to Officer Hernandez’s family. Unfortunately, it appears that the Majority Leader’s protocols will not afford for the resolution to be considered on the House floor.

To Administrator Pistole, please know, and take back to the workforce, that this Committee stands with the agency in this trying time. The shooting that took place at LAX was a tragic and senseless act of violence. All evidence points to a shooter with extreme anti-government views who intentionally and exclusively targeted TSA employees.

These are some of the very federal officers responsible for protecting our nation against a terrorist attack. I hope this incident will result in less rhetoric about, and demonizing of, Transportation Security Officers.

It is also my hope that TSA takes a comprehensive look at how such an incident can be prevented or further mitigated in the future. I applaud Administrator Pistole for taking the initial step of announcing that he will conduct a review of security procedures at checkpoints. I also applaud the Administrator for conducting outreach to a wide variety of stakeholders and federal partners before defining the scope of his review.

This review should serve as an opportunity to examine not only TSA’s partnerships and coordination with local law enforcement, but also all of TSA’s policies, programs and partnerships affecting checkpoint operations.

Today, in addition to discussing the initial lessons from the shooting at LAX, we will examine reports issued by the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General regarding TSA’s Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program – commonly referred to as SPOT.

GAO’s report pulls no punches when it comes to this behavior detection program that costs taxpayers more than \$220 million per year, recommending that Congress consider the lack of scientific evidence to support the program when making funding decisions. The Inspector General’s report, released in May, concluded that TSA could not provide evidence of the cost-effectiveness of the SPOT program.

Given the limited post-sequester dollars available for transportation security activities, we do not have the luxury of spending hundreds of millions of dollars per year on programs for which TSA cannot prove the effectiveness of, or scientifically validate.

Since 2007, TSA has spent nearly one billion dollars on this misguided program. Even TSA admits that it will be years before the agency may be able to display the effectiveness of the SPOT program.

That means hundreds of millions more in taxpayer dollars will need to be spent just to find out whether the program is effective. It is no secret that I have been a critic of the SPOT program since its inception and expansion prior to being validated.

In June of this year, I offered an amendment on the House floor to prohibit TSA from using funds for the SPOT program. Even if I were the program's most vocal proponent, I would not be able to justify continuing to fund it following a review of the GAO and DHS IG reports that will be examined today.

To be clear, I have no doubt that the men and women working on the front lines of this program, the Behavior Detection Officers, are performing as instructed and believe in their service.

But we cannot continue to fund programs with the hope that they will work. We must prioritize limited funds for programs that have been proven effective. The SPOT program does not fit that description."

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