

*Opening Statement – Ranking Member Cedric L. Richmond*

*Subcommittee on Transportation Security*

**Hearing “Examining TSA’s Management of the Screening Partnership Program”**

**July 29, 2014**

---

Today, we will have an opportunity to hear from both private sector and government witnesses about the Transportation Security Administration’s Screening Partnership Program.

Regardless of our personal convictions about whether passenger and baggage screening should be conducted by Federal or contract screeners, we all have an interest in ensuring that TSA is operating the program efficiently and in accordance with the law.

According to TSA, the agency has approved all applications from airports opting to participate in the Screening Partnership Program since changes to the controlling law were enacted in 2012.

While I understand and appreciate concerns about how long it has taken TSA to solicit and award contracts for screening services following the initial approval of applications, my concern about this program is primarily focused on how the existing workforce is impacted.

Transportation Security Officers serve on the front lines of our fight to protect our aviation sector.

Through no fault of their own, they are subject to being left without a job or being forced to take a pay cut and lose benefits when an airport decides to opt-out of using Federal screeners. TSA’s decision to ignore the Department of Labor’s determination that prevailing wage requirements should apply to all SPP contracts only compounds this problem.

I would humbly submit that TSA should stick to security policy and allow the Department of Labor to interpret the applicability of labor laws to Federal contracts.

By defying the Department of Labor on this issue, TSA is encouraging a race to the bottom as it relates to wages for screeners across the country.

This applies to both Federal screeners who work at airports that may opt to participate in the SPP and those with contract screeners already in place.

As contracts for screening services expire and new contracts are bid on, companies with existing contracts will be at a distinct disadvantage in submitting a competitive bid as it relates to cost.

I am hopeful that someone in the Administration will step in, do the right thing, and require TSA to include prevailing wage requirements in SPP contracts.

Failing to do so will result in a return to the pre-9/11 system where screeners were compensated at the bare minimum rate, fostering rapid workforce turnover and an abundance of inexperienced screeners on the front lines. Protecting our aviation system should be a career option, not a part-time, low paying job.

I look forward to hearing from each of the witnesses before the Subcommittee today about their views on TSA's management of the Screening Partnership Program.

Specifically, I am eager to hear the perspective of the frontline workforce from AFGE National President Cox. As the exclusive representative for Transportation Security Officers, AFGE is uniquely positioned to understand the strains placed on the workforce when an airport opts to transition to contract screeners.

I am also looking forward to hearing from Ms. Grover about how TSA has implemented the Government Accountability Office's recommendations for improvements to the program.

Before yielding back, Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that testimony provided to the committee by John L. Martin, Airport Director of San Francisco International Airport, calling for TSA to comply with the Service Contract Act (SCA) and honor the current collectively-bargained rates of wages and benefits for its employees, be entered into the record.

Additionally, I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record testimony provided to the committee from Valarie Long, Executive Vice President of the Service Employees International Union, which expresses serious concern about the failure of TSA to comply with the DOL decision that the SCA applies to SPP contracts and points to the fundamental problems to public security that arise when employees—whether federal or contracted—are not adequately trained and compensated.