

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

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Hearing: “Safeguarding Privacy and Civil Liberties While Keeping our Skies Safe”

September 18, 2014

As the Members of this Subcommittee are well aware, terrorists continue to target our commercial aviation sector for attack. Earlier this year, TSA took steps to mitigate threats emerging from last point of departure airports in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

This past weekend, the Associated Press published an article outlining threats to commercial aviation emerging from terrorists currently residing in Syria.

Yesterday, the Full Committee heard from the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center regarding AQAP’s continued pursuit of high-profile attacks against Western aviation.

Today, the Subcommittee will examine TSA’s Secure Flight program, which serves as a critical tool for identifying high-risk passengers who may pose a threat to our aviation system.

Thanks to the two Government Accountability Office reports released today, we have a clear picture of how TSA can strengthen the Secure Flight program. According to GAO, there is room for improvement in the program as it relates to both operations and privacy training for employees.

I was pleased to see that TSA referenced GAO’s audits in its prepared testimony and considered the Comptroller General’s feedback and recommendations invaluable. I look forward to hearing from both GAO and TSA regarding the improvements that can be made to the Secure Flight program and the timeline for implementing recommended reforms.

I am also interested in hearing from the Director of the Terrorist Screening Center regarding the process for placing known or suspected terrorist on the Selectee and No Fly lists.

The Secure Flight program can only be effective if the Selectee and No Fly lists are up-to-date, accurate, and complete.

For that to be a reality, it requires continuous collaboration between TSA, the Terrorist Screening Center and the intelligence and law enforcement entities that nominate individuals to the watch list.

Given the number of individuals known to have recently traveled to Syria and Iraq to join with terrorist groups, it is imperative that the Selectee and No Fly lists are current and comprehensive.

In the wake of the attempted terrorist attack on Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day in 2009, we learned valuable lessons about how TSA and CBP can better coordinate to identify potentially dangerous passengers in air transit.

It is my hope that we no longer need close calls to prompt TSA to identify better ways to recognize those who pose a threat to commercial aviation.

Before yielding back, I would like to thank each of the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. We appreciate what you do on a day-to-day basis to keep our nation secure.