

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Safeguarding Privacy and Civil Liberties While Keeping our Skies Safe***

September 18, 2014 (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 “Safeguarding Privacy and Civil Liberties While Keeping our Skies Safe”:

“During times of heightened security concerns, like those we currently face in light of the potential threat ISIL poses, there is a tendency to cast aside privacy concerns in favor of security at any cost. To safeguard the American public against such an overreach, it is incumbent upon this Committee to review the privacy protections that the Department of Homeland Security, and its components such as the Transportation Security Administration, has in place.

Thanks to reports released today by the Government Accountability Office, we have a greater understanding of both the privacy protections and performance of TSA’s Secure Flight program. This critical program helps ensure passengers designated as high risk by the intelligence community are screened appropriately or, for those on the No-Fly list, not permitted to board a plane at all.

I look forward to hearing from our witness from the Government Accountability Office, Ms. Grover, regarding the findings and recommendations contained in the reports released today. I am also eager to hear from Mr. Sadler of TSA regarding how the agency intends to implement GAO’s recommendations.

I will also be interested in hearing from TSA regarding the agency’s plans to upgrade the technology used by Transportation Security Officers to better enable them to identify and ensure the proper screening of individuals designated as Selectees.

The Secure Flight program is only as good as the end user. It does no good for taxpayers to spend over \$100 million a year on a program dedicated to ensuring the proper screening of individuals if Travel Document Checkers do not recognize the passengers’ designation.

As it relates to current threats to aviation, I will be interested in hearing from the Director of the Terrorist Screening Center about how information is obtained and used to designate individuals as Selectees or to place them on the No-Fly list.

With reports of Americans having joined ISIL and other groups fighting in Syria and Iraq, our Members want assurances that individuals engaging in terrorist activities are placed on the appropriate lists in as close to real-time as possible. While Secretary Johnson was clear with the Committee yesterday that there is no credible information that ISIL is planning to attack the homeland at this time, we must remain vigilant.

That means using all of the tools we have available to us to ensure that individuals who intend to commit acts of terrorism are properly identified. While doing so, we must also protect against violating the privacy and civil liberties of the American public.

In part, that means having a constitutional appeal process for individuals wrongly designated and placed on the No-Fly-List.

I look forward to hearing from both TSA and the TSC witnesses regarding how the appeal process is being revamped to address the recent decision from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals that the previous appeals process is unconstitutional.”

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