

*Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice (D-NY)*

*Subcommittee on Transportation Security  
Committee on Homeland Security*

**Hearing:  
“A Review of Access Control Measures at Our Nation’s Airports”**

**February 3, 2015**

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First, I want to thank you for convening this hearing, and I want to express my eagerness to work with you and with all the members of this subcommittee to do absolutely everything we can to maximize the security of our aviation sector.

The Transportation Security Administration’s mission is to “protect the Nation’s transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce.” The TSA stands on the front lines in the effort to protect the traveling public, but we know they don’t stand there alone.

Aviation security is a truly collaborative effort. Airports, vendors, airlines and the TSA work as a team to prevent terrorists and criminals from harming the traveling public on the ground and in the air. All members of that team should be commended, as the aviation sector is stronger and more secure today than it has ever been.

However, all members of that team must also be equally engaged in the effort to identify and correct any deficiencies in our aviation security. Recent incidents have revealed such deficiencies – vulnerabilities that exist within our airports and must be swiftly addressed...for the sake of our national security and the safety of the American people.

Last December, authorities in my home state of New York uncovered a gun-smuggling operation in which a former airline employee brought weapons and ammunition – 153 firearms, including an AK-47 assault rifle – aboard commercial flights in carry-on luggage over a period of several months, before he was arrested selling weapons to undercover Federal Bureau of Investigation agents on multiple occasions.

Also in my home state, just a few weeks ago, a safety inspector from the Federal Aviation Administration was arrested at LaGuardia Airport after authorities discovered a firearm in his carry-on luggage. This individual flew from Atlanta to New York with a gun in his carry-on, and was even allowed access to the cockpit while the plane was in the air.

It would be easy to point fingers at particular airports or airlines involved in these incidents. But that would overlook the most important lesson to be learned. Major deficiencies exist right now within our airport security systems, and if these incidents can happen at one airport, they can happen at any airport.

That is the reality we face, and we’re here today to ensure that these deficiencies will be corrected as quickly and completely as possible.

What links these two incidents is that in both cases, the individuals exploited their Secure Identification Display Area credentials – also known as SIDA badges – to bypass security and bring prohibited items into secure areas.

It will take a collaborative, comprehensive effort to ensure that, on the front end, SIDA badges are distributed only to individuals who have been thoroughly vetted and deemed worthy of being trusted with them...And secondly, to ensure that no one entrusted with an SIDA badge is exploiting it.

I know that employee screening is a major component of the TSA's multi-layered strategy for addressing security vulnerabilities within the aviation sector. I look forward to hearing from Acting Deputy Administrator Hatfield today about how the TSA can further enhance this layer of security, and ensure that no unauthorized items make it into secure areas of airports.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Southwell, the Aviation General Manager of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, about the short, intermediate, and long-term solutions he plans to implement in order to reform his airport's security system and neutralize the insider threat.

Also with us today is Ms. Pinkerton, a member of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee, an entity that was codified into law through legislation offered by Ranking Member Thompson last Congress to advise on a wide variety of aviation security issues. As Ms. Pinkerton represents the perspective of multiple airports, I'm eager to hear her advice about what we can do across all our nation's airports to eliminate this dangerous vulnerability.

Lastly, I look forward to Deputy Assistant Director Perdue shedding light on the FBI's involvement in incidents such as those I've mentioned, and to discuss the penalties associated with these breaches and whether those penalties are adequate and effective.

Again, I want to reiterate that this is and must always be a collaborative effort. It's my intent that through open dialogue between all of the entities here today, we can successfully neutralize access-control incidents and eliminate a major deficiency in our nation's aviation security system.