FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Risk-Based Security: Assessing the Path Forward for TSA PreCheck

March 25, 2015 (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 "Risk-Based Security: Assessing the Path Forward for TSA Pre✓":

"I appreciate the Subcommittee's willingness to take a hard look at the security vulnerabilities associated with how the Transportation Security Administration is administering the PreCheck program. As a frequent flier, I have long believed that TSA should have a trusted traveler program where individuals identified as "low-risk travelers" are provided expedited airport security screening.

When TSA was established in 2001 Congress granted TSA the authority to establish a trusted traveler program. However, as many of you may recall, it took years for TSA to get over its initial reluctance about modifying its screening operations for vetted, trusted travelers.

Former-TSA Administrator John Pistole deserves great credit for recognizing the potential of a trusted traveler program and integrating the PreCheck program into TSA's risk-based airport screening operations. It just makes sense to provide expedited screening to passengers who have voluntarily submitted biographical information and fingerprints and have been fully-vetted.

Today, there are 1 million known low-risk travelers in the PreCheck program. That's a good start but given that about two million people fly every day, TSA needs continue working to bring more Americans into the PreCheck program.

That said, the focus of today's hearing is not on the vetted population that are legitimately "low risk" and receive expedited screening. It is on what TSA has called their "real-time/intelligence-based methods" for identifying passengers, on a trip-by-trip basis, for expedited physical screening.

The so-called "Managed Inclusion" program and the other real-time screening method that TSA is currently employing at our Nation's airports have not been scientifically validated as effective security approaches.

Further, as both the Department's own Inspector General and the Comptroller General have independently found, these approaches create security vulnerabilities.

Last week, the Inspector General released a report about a very troubling incident involving a traveler who was granted enhanced security screening. Suffice as to say, the terrorist and criminal history of the traveler involved should have resulted in TSA determining that enhanced security screening was in order, not expedited screening.

This is just one incident and I am sure it would have never come to light if not for the courageous TSA employee who came forward to report it.   This incident begs the question, are these procedures appropriately designed to ensure that a person who actually present a security risk is not given lighter screening?

I have no confidence, based on the public and classified information I have seen, that this is the case. As such, I believe that the situation demands legislative action.

To that end, together with Chairman Katko and Ranking Member Rice, I will be introducing legislation to address these known vulnerabilities regarding expedited screening. It is unfortunate that there is not a permanent leader at TSA to address the security vulnerabilities that have come to light.

I look forward to working with the leadership of this Subcommittee to bring our concerns to attention of Acting Administrator Mel Carraway and to get timely action to address the security vulnerabilities."

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