

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****How TSA Can Improve Aviation Worker Vetting***

June 16, 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 “How TSA Can Improve Aviation Worker Vetting”:

“Today is the Subcommittee’s fourth hearing this Congress. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, each oversight hearing we have had this Congress has focused on vulnerabilities in the Transportation Security Administration’s vetting processes. Our first and third hearings were on access control, and were prompted by an abuse of Secure Identification Display Area (SIDA) badges. One incident involved airport workers in Atlanta who were allegedly using their SIDA badges to bypass security checkpoints in order to traffic guns on planes from Atlanta to New York. Together with the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I have initiated a Government Accountability Office audit into access control and perimeter security at our nation’s airports. It is my understanding that work is currently underway.

Our second hearing involved the future of the PreCheck program. At that hearing, we did not focus on the vetted population that have been granted the expedited screening that PreCheck affords, but the focus was on the Managed Inclusion portion of PreCheck, a “real time/intelligence based method” that allows passengers to be included in expedited screening on a trip by trip basis.

Unfortunately, Managed Inclusion has not been scientifically validated. In fact, a week prior to the hearing on this portion of the PreCheck program, the Inspector General released an alarming report about an incident involving a traveler who was granted expedited security screening. The terrorist and criminal history of the traveler should have resulted in TSA determining that enhanced screening of the traveler was in order and not the other way around. Together with the Chairman and Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I introduced legislation that requires TSA to secure an independent assessment to validate expedited screening outside of existing trusted traveler programs.

Today’s hearing, focuses on the vetting process for aviation workers. TSA is responsible for vetting the aviation workers who are allowed in the sterile areas of the airport. In his report, the Inspector General identified 73 airport employees who had links to terrorism that TSA did not identify because TSA does not receive certain terrorism-related information in the watchlisting process due to interagency watchlisting policies. TSA officials agreed with the Inspector General.

However, this report continued to shed light on the areas of concern that we addressed earlier this year in our hearings on access control. TSA does not have adequate monitoring processes in place to ensure that airport operators properly verify an applicant’s criminal history. Our oversight hearings, coupled with reports from the Inspector General and the Comptroller General, illustrate that TSA is still in need of reform.

By no means is this an indictment on Transportation Security Officers or aviation workers, but we have found security vulnerabilities that require immediate attention. TSA needs a strong, Senate confirmed leader to implement changes and continue to steer it in the right direction. Vice Admiral Peter Neffenger has been selected to lead TSA, and it is my hope that his Senate confirmation will come quickly, and that he will begin to work to provide solutions to some of these glaring problems within TSA. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee in a bipartisan manner to continue to address TSA’s needs and address security vulnerabilities.”

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