

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Aviation Security Challenged: Is TSA Ready for the Threats of Today?***

July 29, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Aviation Security Challenged: Is TSA Ready for the Threats of Today?”:

“TSA was established by Congress in the wake of the September 11th attacks. It has responsibility for protecting the Nation’s surface and aviation transportation systems, and ensuring the free movement of people and goods. Over the years, in protecting aviation systems, TSA has used a number of methods to screen passengers. Some of the technological changes TSA has made, however, have cost taxpayers millions of dollars while failing to adequately address the threat to aviation security.

Unfortunately, TSA is still having problems with its technologies today. For example, last month, it was reported that auditors posing as passengers were able to smuggle mock explosives and banned weapons through checkpoints at various airports across the country. Earlier this Spring, the Inspector General released a report claiming that TSA does not properly manage the maintenance of its airport screening equipment. According to the IG, TSA has not issued adequate policies to airports for carrying out maintenance responsibilities.

Administrator Neffenger, I challenge you to address these issues with the technologies used in the airport environment. As you approach this issue, consider both the current threat picture and the emerging threats. Keep in mind that there are small and minority businesses in this country with exceptional technologies that could be beneficial to TSA and improve efficiencies at airports. Former Administrator Pistole implemented a risk based approach to passenger screening.

However, both the Government Accountability Office and the Office of Inspector General have identified shortcomings with this approach especially when it comes to granting passengers expedited screening through Managed Inclusion. Significant shortcomings include: problems with the model used to identify passengers for the Managed Inclusion Program and the usefulness of having behavior detection officers implement the Managed Inclusion Program.

This past Monday, legislation introduced by Subcommittee Chairman Katko, Ranking Member Rice, and me directs TSA to limit expedited airport screening to participants of the PreCheck program and other known low risk passengers. Our bill passed the House. Last week, three new measures were approved by the Transportation Security Subcommittee. As we consider the three bills, we know that there are some issues remain for the Full Committee’s consideration.

For instance, significant concerns have been raised by a diverse group of labor stakeholders for the measure aimed to address the alarming reports of multiple security breaches caused by employees exploiting security gaps and abusing their credential privileges. As we close these gaps, we must ensure that the men and women whose job it is to protect the flying public are not unduly impacted. As TSA legislation works its way through the legislative process, we would welcome constructive engagement with TSA.

Administrator Neffenger, not only do I look forward to hearing from you on how you plan to address these issues, but also I want to hear from you on how you plan to address TSA's most valuable asset—its workforce. TSA is plagued with very low morale and an extremely high turnover rate. Employees cite low pay and barriers to advancement as some of their main issues. Additionally, the Federal Air Marshal Service has not had a class in nearly four years. Administrator Neffenger, I want to know your perspective on this and what steps you plan on taking to improve employee morale and if you plan on employing more FAMS.

TSA plays a vital part of protecting America. We can work together to help solve its problems. I look forward to this Committee working with the new Administrator in a bipartisan fashion to help TSA improve.”

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>