

***Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice
Subcommittee on Transportation Security***

**Hearing - “Assessing TSA’s Management and Implementation of the
Screening Partnership Program”**

November 17, 2015

After the attacks on September 11th, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act established the Transportation Security Administration as the federal entity responsible for transportation security and a federal screener workforce. This represented a pivot away from the pre-9/11 model – but it also included an amendment that led to the establishment of SPP, which gives airports the opportunity to “opt-out” of federal screening and instead contract private companies to conduct security screening services under federal oversight.

We often hear in Congress that screening without TSOs will lead to a more pleasant and expedient travel experience. But this is simply not the case. When an airport opts out of federal screening and begins to transition to private screeners, they recruit – and as we will hear today – in many cases **DEPEND** on the retention of TSOs, who are given the right of first refusal for these positions.

The airports enforce the same policies and procedures, hoping to retain the same personnel, who are often forced to choose between accepting the same job with less benefits, relocating to continue working for TSA, or finding other jobs. To coincide with this hearing, GAO released a report that compares the costs incurred by TSA to perform screening to the costs associated with privatized screening.

First, I believe that through this report, we will come to find that without certain changes, we cannot have a true comparison between the screening entities. I look forward to hearing Ms. Grover’s testimony and thoughts on TSAs cost estimate methodology.

Second, we have the example of four airports in Montana that opted-out of federal screening, but ultimately terminated the contracts because the vendor couldn’t attract or retain staff levels to perform screening duties. So, while these airports opted for private screening, in many instances they still had to rely on TSA’s national deployment force to provide screening. That’s very concerning.

I thank Ms. Dorgham for being here today, and I hope she will speak to those concerns and discuss the oversight that takes place at these airports that opt-out of federal screening. I’m also eager to hear who pays for those TSA deployment forces, and if those costs are included in TSA’s cost estimates on the front end of the contracting process.

Finally, before closing, I would like to acknowledge the horrific acts of terrorism that occurred in Paris on Friday. Those attacks, along with the explosion of a Metrojet in Egypt, remind us that the threat of terrorism has not gone away. That threat is very real, it is constant, and it is always evolving.

Transportation Security Officers play a critical role in confronting that threat. They serve on the frontline of our nation’s airports, screening millions of passengers daily, and I thank them for working to keep the traveling public safe.

Thank you again for convening this hearing. I look forward to a productive dialogue today, as well as the follow-up hearing scheduled for December, where we will be able to consider additional perspectives.