

*Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)  
Committee on Homeland Security*

**Transportation Security Subcommittee hearing on:  
“Assessing TSA’s Management and Implementation of the Screening  
Partnership Program”**

**November 17, 2015**

---

It is my understanding that this subcommittee will be holding a follow up hearing to take testimony and question representatives of the workforce on their perspectives on the Screening Partnership Program.

At the beginning of this hearing, the Government Accountability Office released a report requested by Members of the majority regarding the Transportation Security Administration’s use of cost estimates and how these estimates for the federal government to perform screening measure against costs incurred by private contractors to provide screening in the nation’s airports through the Screening Partnership Program.

I look forward to Ms. Grover’s testimony today, particularly on whether or not the statistics included in this estimation truly represent an apples-to-apples comparison of the costs to federal screeners versus private screeners.

I believe that there are a number of factors that can significantly alter these statistics.

SPP allows airports the option of returning to the pre-9/11 model of using contract employees to screen passengers and baggage at our nation’s airports.

Mr. Chairman, after the recent plane crash in Russia and the horrific attacks in Paris, both of which ISIL has claimed responsibility for, any facet of aviation security that mirrors a pre 9/11 state should be strongly reconsidered.

After 9/11 it was clear to the vast majority of Members of Congress and the Bush Administration that transitioning to a federal screener workforce was the right thing to do for the security of our nation.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there has not been a successful terrorist attack on our aviation system on U.S. soil.

Despite that fact, there have been numerous calls from across the aisle to return to a workforce that is increasingly composed of contract screeners.

Some claim that transitioning to a contract workforce results in more efficient and friendlier screeners, but there are no studies or information that back up this assertion.

As I have said on numerous occasions, Transportation Security Officers perform a thankless job.

These men and women, who go to work every day to ensure the safety of the traveling public, along with TSA practices and policies designed to do the same, are often ridiculed and singled out as the reason for unpleasant screening experiences.

Members of the majority will point to this as well as gaps in our aviation security screening identified by the Inspector General and GAO as the basis for needing to transition to a privatized screening workforce.

However, what the public needs to know is that when an airport chooses to use contract screeners, the private company recruits the federal workers. By law, privatized screeners follow the same screening protocols and procedures as federal Transportation Security Officers.

Moreover, the vendors who are awarded these screening contracts *depend* on the retention of Transportation Security Officers to carry out their contracts.

For instance, in Montana, a contract was awarded to a vendor who assumed that it would be able to retain a significant portion of TSAs workforce in those airports to carry out screening functions.

Citing various reasons, including the vast difference in benefits, these Transportation Security Officers decided not to transition to a contracted workforce, and instead decided to stay within the Transportation Security Administration and secure jobs in other airports.

This contractor was in the predicament of not being able to attract the requisite number of employees required to conduct sufficient screening within these airports, and had to supplement their screeners with National Deployment Officers from the Transportation Security Administration.

This incident raises many questions, including the oversight that is in place to ensure that contractors are able to perform under the terms of their contracts.

I thank Ms. Dorgam for being here today, and look forward to her testimony on this subject.

Finally, I would like to point out that many of the changes made to the law controlling for entry into the Screening Partnership Program in the *FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012* were ill-informed and should be repealed.

Chief among those is the provision allowing for subsidiaries of foreign-owned corporations to compete for and be awarded contracts for screening services.

Earlier this congress, I introduced the Aviation Screening Contractor Reform and Accountability Act, which would reinstate the law stipulating that a company could only get a contract for screening services if it was owned and controlled by a U.S. citizen.