

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****The Transportation Security Administration's FY2017 Budget Request***

March 2, 2016 (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 “The Transportation Security Administration’s FY2017 Budget Request”:

“Administrator Neffenger, your leadership and vision at TSA are greatly appreciated. You and I share the goal of moving TSA in a better direction. In your budget request, there are areas that are encouraging and show that resources, which seem to shrink year-by-year, are being allocated to programs and areas where they are most needed.

On the other hand, there are areas that are cause for concern. One such area involves the Transportation Security Acquisition Reform Act, and your plan for technology acquisition in general. The Act, of which I was an original cosponsor, was signed into law in December of 2014. It requires TSA to develop and inform biennially a five-year technology investment plan that includes justification for acquisitions, as well as performance baseline requirements.

The strategic plan, which was introduced in August 2015, was lauded by security technology manufacturers, as it provided a road map for the technology priorities of TSA. These stakeholders could then allocate their research and development resources towards projects that aligned with the mission and intentions of TSA.

This is especially important to small businesses who attempt to compete in this space, who do not have the capital to develop technologies that they believe meet an existing need to TSA, only to have the agency go in another direction.

We were shocked to learn from stakeholders that the budget request did not align with the acquisition schedule contained within the five-year plan. For instance, within the Strategic 5 Year Technology Plan, TSA indicates its intention to acquire 897 enhanced metal detectors for checkpoint screening, and no intent to purchase boarding pass scanners or credential authentication technology systems.

In the budget request, however, there is no intent to procure the enhanced metal detectors, and that funds will be used to purchase 625 credential authentication technology systems, and 175 boarding pass scanners.

Another area of great concern is the staffing levels at our nation’s airports. The Federal Aviation Administration is projecting passenger growth at a rate of two percent per year, and this summer is expected to be one of the busiest in recent years. We hear time and again from large airports that have infrastructures capable of housing many security lanes within their checkpoint areas, but due to staffing shortages, they use only a fraction of the lanes.

Recent changes in the standing operating procedures resulting from covert testing have forced TSOs to take steps to ensure that they are performing their jobs as thoroughly as possible. We thank them for being on the front lines in the aviation security effort.

Given the forecast of increased passenger volume, along with underutilized checkpoints, I am

concerned that congested screening queues will create additional vulnerabilities.

I look forward to hearing from you today on ways the screening allocation model can achieve greater efficiencies, or other ways in which we might address the issue.

This budget request also contains funds to recruit and train the first Federal Air Marshal Service class since 2011. I also look forward to hearing about how you are working to address diversity issues within the coming FAMS recruitment class and the instances of misconduct that have plagued the agency.”

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