



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)  
*Preventing the Next Attack: TSA's Role in Keeping Our  
Transportation Systems Secure***

**November 8, 2017**

I want to begin by expressing my condolences to the family and friends of those who lost their lives in the heinous terrorist attack in New York City last week and thank the brave first responders who came to the aid of the injured. Our thoughts and prayers are with them all.

I also want to express my condolences to the loved ones of those killed in Sunday's horrific shooting at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas. Yet another American community has been devastated by a mass shooting, once again at a place of worship.

This week I sent Chairman McCaul a letter asking to move my legislation, H.R. 1486, the Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act of 2017, as a standalone bill. H.R. 1486 establishes a program to authorize grants to non-profit organizations, including faith-based communities, to assist them with acquisition or installation of security equipment and training related to preventing and protecting against attacks. I appreciate the Chairman's prior cooperation on this issue and hope H.R. 1486 will be considered at the next scheduled markup to expedite consideration of this important legislation in the Senate.

I would be remiss if I did not follow up on a letter I sent the Chairman last week, urging him to reschedule without further delay the abruptly postponed Full Committee hearing to examine the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster preparedness and response activities originally scheduled for November 1.

I must say I found the Chairman's rationale for the postponement perplexing, as our witness, the Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, was invited in full compliance with House and Committee Rules. The Majority had scheduled the hearing for a date of its choosing and had more than ample time to invite state and local witnesses, if they had wanted do so.

Our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are counting on us to ensure the Federal government provides desperately needed emergency relief to their devastated communities, as it has for those affected by recent hurricanes in Florida and Texas. I look forward to the Committee holding this important hearing without further delay.

Focusing on the issue at hand, I thank the Chairman for holding today's hearing and welcome Administrator Pekoske to the Committee. Administrator Pekoske, we appreciate

the task you have to secure the Nation's transportation system.

The fact that the Department considered banning devices larger than a smart phone from all U.S.-bound passenger planes earlier this year reflects the seriousness of the threats to aviation today.

Indeed, while the September 11th attacks were 16 years ago, new and more dangerous threats are constantly emerging. To address these threats, the Trump Administration must invest in aviation security to strengthen TSA's effectiveness.

Instead, the Administration appears hell-bent on squandering billions on a boondoggle border wall that will do nothing to make the Nation more secure. Meanwhile, \$1.28 BILLION in aviation security fees are diverted from TSA operations annually, ostensibly to fund "deficit reduction."

At the same time, House Republicans are currently pushing a tax package that would add at least \$1.5 TRILLION to the deficit, while helping the wealthy and well-connected and leaving the middle class to pick up the tab. It simply defies common sense.

In addition to providing the financial resources necessary for the agency to do its job effectively, TSA must address the workforce challenges that have plagued it since its creation. TSA has consistently struggled with low morale across the workforce, ranking 303 out of 305 government agencies in 2016.

Low morale has a nexus to the high turnover rate within the ranks of Transportation Security Officers (TSOs). TSOs represent 70% of the TSA workforce, yet have been denied full collective bargaining rights, whistleblower protections, and opportunities to effectively raise issues in dispute to an independent third party, such as the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Additionally, TSOs are subject to a pay and performance system that does not track with the General Services (GS) wage system, the primary wage system for Federal workers. In order to move the workforce forward and see the necessary changes envisioned, it is imperative for TSA's frontline personnel to receive these critical protections.

Democrats stand ready to work with Administrator Pekoske to ensure that TSA has the resources necessary to effectively train and maintain the workforce it needs to carry out its vital mission.

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