



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Full Committee Markup
September 13, 2016**

On Sunday, we observed the 15th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. On that day, terror and hate took the lives of 3,000 innocent people and inflicted a deep and lasting wound on our nation.

With each passing year, we rededicate ourselves to the heroism displayed that day and recognize the commitment of our Armed Forces, the Department of Homeland Security, State and local partners, and the private sector to protecting us against terrorism.

In response to this unprecedented attack, DHS was established so that dots could be connected and efforts could be better integrated. While the Department has matured in many ways, it continues to be hamstrung by a congressional oversight model that has outlived its usefulness.

As a result, this Congress, DHS has had to answer to seven different House Committees and seven different Senate Committees. I look forward to working with Chairman McCaul to give DHS what the 9/11 Commission recommended over a decade ago-- "a single, principal point of oversight and review for homeland security."

Today, we will be considering nine bills based on the Committee's oversight of cybersecurity, aviation security, and emergency preparedness and response.

All but one of the bills under consideration today have my full support. The measure I oppose is H.R. 5728, the "Cuban Airport Security Act".

As someone who has long been interested in fostering better relations with our neighbors in the Caribbean, I have been heartened by President Obama's commitment to chart a new course on relations with Cuba. For too long, politics have stood in the way of progress.

Wheels up on the first passenger flight between Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Santa Clara, Cuba, on August 31st marked an auspicious beginning to a new chapter in U.S.-Cuba relations.

A great deal of effort on the part of the Transportation Security Administration, the

Federal Aviation Administration, and the State Department went into implementing safety and security protocols with the Cuban authorities and for TSA to give flights a “green light”.

Regrettably, the sponsors of H.R. 5728 have chosen to disregard this record and, instead have decided to hold the Cuban airports to a standard different than all other foreign airports with direct flights to the U.S.

The Department has told the Committee that to single out one specific foreign airport for this type of reporting requirement would be “unprecedented”

Further, DHS has expressed concern that reporting on this information could have “a chilling effect with international partners” which could result in reduced access to airports for assessments and air carrier inspections and potentially deprive DHS of one of the best tools it has to ensure flights to the U.S. are secure.

I plan to offer an amendment to underscore that Congress has no business singling out one country or airport for additional security mandates. I urge Members to support my amendment.

The bill ignores that if TSA has some specific security concerns about one or more of the Cuban airports, it can take enforcement action, as it would do with respect to any other foreign airport.

Moreover, H.R. 5728 seeks to improperly interfere with the operations of U.S. carriers by requiring the full text of agreements with the Cuban authorities to be publicly disclosed or lose the privilege to employ Cuban nationals at the Cuban airports to process flights.

Such agreements may contain proprietary and sensitive information that could stifle competition to the detriment of the flying public. I have trouble seeing what the compelling security argument would be for interfering with air carriers in this manner. For these reasons, I strongly oppose H.R. 5728 and urge Members to join me in doing so.

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