

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Services Hearing

Innovation at TSA: Examining Threat Mitigation Through Technology Acquisitions Reform

January 18, 2018

The Transportation Security Administration is essential to our nation's security. Americans rely on the work of TSA employees to keep us safe from a long and growing list of terrorist threats. Over the last year, we have seen the threat landscape change and watched TSA work to adapt.

In March, we watched TSA grapple with the question of whether to ban electronic devices larger than a smart phone from all U.S.-bound passenger planes in response to the threat landscape. And since last summer, TSA has had to reevaluate the level of transportation security on a number of occasions. In August, a serious ISIS-connected cargo-based explosives plot came to light, which was to be carried out on an international flight. Then in December, a would-be terrorist attempted an attack on the New York City subway system.

Even though the terrorist threat picture evolves at an uncomfortably quick pace, the number of travelers who rely on TSA security operations has increased. During the holiday season, TSA screened a record 42 million passengers and 31 million checked bags at airports across the country.

TSA's plate is close to full. Still, we need the agency to do more. We need TSA to continue to be a leader in aviation security and invest in leading technologies that will keep our transportation systems safe.

For me, today's is an opportunity to look beyond the five-year technology investment plan that appears to be the impetus for the hearing and to focus on the bigger picture—when is TSA going to fully realize its mission of effectively securing all modes of transportation against terrorism?

As such, today, I want to hear from Administrator Pekoske about his plans to address the growing threat to soft targets in surface transportation, ongoing workforce challenges, air cargo security, and behavior detection screening.

Additionally, we need to discuss the passenger security fee diversion. It is unconscionable that at a time when the threats to aviation and surface transportation systems are so sophisticated and diverse, TSA is forced, on an annual basis, to hand over \$1.28 billion in aviation security fees it collects to the U.S. Treasury for deficit reduction.

The truth of the matter is that we cannot continue to have conversations on how TSA should do better or move faster to deploy innovative security screening equipment without having an honest conversation about TSA's resource needs.

As members of this Subcommittee, we are best-positioned to know what TSA needs and, without question, TSA needs us to enact H.R. 2514, "Funding for Aviation Screeners and Threat Elimination Restoration (FASTER) Act" so that it can receive the funds necessary to procure security screening technology.

We know the President's budget will be released soon. Mr. Administrator, I would ask that you work really hard to ensure that this time around, in contrast to last year's submission, what we receive actually reflects your operational needs. Given everything that we are going to discuss today, following this hearing with a tone-deaf budget proposal would be unacceptable.