

## Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

### Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security Hearing

#### *Examining the President's FY 2019 Budget Request for the Transportation Security Administration*

**April 12, 2018**

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Everyone here today is well aware of the serious nature of the terrorist threat facing our transportation systems.

Time and time again, we are provided chilling evidence of terrorists' intent to inflict harm against innocent Americans by attacking planes, subways, or buses.

Each time, we ask ourselves and our expert witnesses: what more can we be doing to protect against such ruthless attacks?

And over and over, we are told: "It is simply a matter of resources."

"We have great ideas and great security measures; we just need more funding to deploy more officers, more canines, more technology."

That is why it is so disappointing that this Administration's TSA budget proposal eliminates, cuts, or shortchanges critical security programs.

I have made repeated calls for increased security for surface transportation systems.

The threat is clear, as we have seen mostly in overseas attacks.

Last December, the threat hit home when an attacker detonated a bomb within the New York City subway system.

So how does the President's budget address this growing, dangerous threat?

It proposes building a border wall, paid for by gutting the few programs aimed at securing surface transportation.

Specifically, the President's proposed budget calls for eliminating TSA's Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response or "VIPR" program and cutting by nearly two-thirds of the Transit Security Grant Program which provides security funding to transit owners and operators.

Let me give you another example of where the President's budget inexplicably shortchanges security.

Repeatedly, we have seen attacks occurring within public airport areas, from Brussels to Los Angeles, Paris to New Orleans, Istanbul to Ft. Lauderdale.

Airports are crowded, open, critical spaces, and attacks can result in significant loss of life.

So how does the President's budget address this threat?

It proposes building a border wall, paid for by eliminating the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program which assists local law enforcement in providing police coverage to airports and TSA checkpoints, and by shifting TSA's duty to secure exit lanes to airports and local jurisdictions.

Finally, when it comes to the TSA workforce, the President's budget proposal is just as off-base.

TSA officers are overworked and underpaid.

In 2017, TSA employees ranked 336<sup>th</sup> out of 339 government agencies in overall morale, and dead last in satisfaction with their pay.

TSA operates its own personnel and pay system and does not afford its employees the same regular salary increases and disciplinary rights enjoyed by most other Federal workers.

As a result, TSA deals with high attrition rates and insufficient staffing levels.

In response to these problems, the President's budget proposes—you guessed it—building a border wall rather than investing in the dedicated TSA workforce and providing them the rights they deserve.

Somehow, these examples are just a small sampling of problems with the budget proposal, which also fails to invest adequately in Computed Tomography or "CT" machines, does not increase funding for highly effective canine teams, and proposes increasing passenger security fees despite the ongoing diversion of much of those fees from TSA's appropriations.

This budget proposal is the result of a President choosing to prioritize his misguided campaign promise to build an \$18 billion border wall over urgent national security needs.

It is unacceptable, and Congress must reject it.

I am encouraged that the recently passed omnibus prioritizes some of our most pressing transportation security needs, providing \$43 million in funding for 31 VIPR teams, \$45 million for the LEO Reimbursement Program, and \$77 million to continue securing exit lanes.

That this omnibus presents such a sharp contrast to the proposed budget we are discussing today should raise some red flags.

I hope this hearing today will help shed light on the devastating effects this budget would have if it were enacted.