

Opening Statement – Ranking Member Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ)

“Long Lines, Short Patience: Local Perspectives”

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Thursday, May 26, 2016

Recently, wait times have been a major cause for concern within our nation’s airports. Last week for example, due to extreme wait times, the Transportation Security Administration reallocated resources to Chicago-Midway International Airport and Newark Liberty Airport—to decrease the length of screening lines.

While I am pleased that TSOs are being given the opportunity to be converted to full-time, and the Administration has taken steps to address the problem in the interim, we need to find viable long term solutions to this problem.

Reallocating, or taking one airport’s resources and giving them to another, will only fix the problem temporarily. For the summer travel period, TSA has predicted that nearly 740 million individuals will use commercial aviation to travel, which happens to be the most air travelers this country has ever seen.

In contrast, TSOs, who are responsible for screening passengers and baggage, are at some of the lowest numbers we’ve seen in years. This is due, in large part, to limited resources.

Under former-Administrator Pistole, the agency pivoted to risk based security, a frame of mind that we focus our resources on individuals who we know less about- and rightfully so.

However, this methodology also came with programs that were not sustainable due to security risks, such as Managed Inclusion 2, which has since ceased. Although they are still using a risk-based approach, it does not take away from the fact that the amount of travelers, when compared to the number of people traveling, is insufficient.

Last week the Transportation Security Subcommittee held a roundtable discussion with airports and many important things were discussed. There was general agreement that BDOs could be used in other roles throughout the screener model. Yesterday, we learned that TSA agrees, and supports Federal Security Directors having the flexibility to use BDOs in different ways.

We also heard concern on whether or not Federal Security Directors had enough flexibility to operate as necessary with checkpoint staffing. The Administrator testified yesterday that he believed that they always had such flexibility, and that he worked to ensure that they knew that they had this flexibility.

Now, we get to hear more perspectives from stakeholders who are intimately involved with commercial aviation- an airline and the airports themselves. Today, I look forward to hearing what your experiences throughout this issue have been, as well as how you view the steps that are being taken by the administration, and in some instances, yourselves, to address wait times.

I would also like to thank President Cox from AFGE for being here to serve as the voice of the workforce. TSOs represent the frontline in our efforts to secure the commercial aviation sector. They do an outstanding job screening passengers and their belongings, and often unfairly receive the majority of the blame for this issue. Their perspective is absolutely vital in this conversation.