

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

General Aviation Security: Assessing Risks and the Road Ahead

July 15, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee hearing entitled “General Aviation Security: Assessing Risks and the Road Ahead”:

“This afternoon’s hearing will evaluate progress made by TSA in developing and implementing effective security policies for general aviation.

It will also allow the Committee to further analyze TSA’s approach to mitigating risks to general aviation, as well as actions the Department has taken to decrease the likelihood of general aviation being used to transport deadly materials.

In the United States, there are more than 19,000 total landing facilities designated for general aviation aircraft.

In addition, the general aviation fleet consists of about 200,000 registered aircraft.

While the fleet is diverse and embodies a complex industry, there are limited policies and practices employed by the Department to screen and inspect general aviation aircraft coming to the United States from a foreign point of departure.

It is imperative that the components within the Department work seamlessly to mitigate any risks associated with inbound general aviation aircraft, including the possibility of transporting weapons of mass destruction.

Just last spring, U.S. fighter jets chased a pilot after he stole a Cessna plane from a Canadian flight school and flew in U.S. airspace without properly identifying himself or his flight plan.

Incidents such as this force the United States into a reactionary position when responding to general aviation threats, potentially endangering the lives of thousands of Americans.

I know there has been considerable discussion about TSA’s Large Aircraft Security Program. The notice of proposed rulemaking was justifiably met with concerns held by stakeholders.

As I mentioned in my March 2009 letter to TSA about its proposed rule, we need to be

sure that all stakeholders are engaged and that any eventual rule reflects the nuances and needs of the industry.

Today, I am interested in hearing from TSA about how it is improving its processes so the final rule is well-measured and justifiable. I am also interested in the perspective of industry stakeholders on the second panel regarding this program.

A close evaluation and monitoring of existing general aviation security programs at the Department is in order, and I think this hearing is a step in the right direction.”

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