

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Protecting the Protectors: Examining the Personnel Challenges Facing the Federal Air Marshal Service”**

July 23, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Management, Investigations, and Oversight Subcommittee hearing entitled “Protecting the Protectors: Examining the Personnel Challenges Facing the Federal Air Marshal Service”:

“Since the tragic events of 9/11 and the increased dependence on the Federal Air Marshal Service, the Service has faced a series of personnel challenges including:

- Staffing up from 33 Marshals to thousands;
- Putting effective and well communicated personnel policies in place that empower and aide the Marshals, not hinder;
- Recognizing the variety of skill sets and experiences the employees bring to FAMS and ensuring the effectiveness of their training;
- Ensuring the workforce can report waste, fraud, abuse and concerns without fear of retaliation; and
- Confronting on-going quality of life issues for the growing workforce.

Addressing these challenges has not been easy. But I think it’s safe to say that the FAMS has come a long way. After a downward spiral with countless complaints and concerns, the Service realized that they needed to turn the corner and fix the considerable damage that had been done to its workforce morale and reputation.

Steps have been taken to engage the workforce and also to produce better policies on schedules, flight check-ins and boarding, dress codes and other matters.

While better, there is always room for improvement. Now, we are faced with charting a way forward.

To do so, the Service needs to properly oversee the execution of its improved policies and refine them as necessary. FAMS must have a proper and fair personnel system, with clear policies and adequate tools and resources.

They must continue to recruit the best and the brightest and diversify its ranks – not only among the Air Marshals but in Management positions.

Further, the connection and collaboration between Headquarters and Field Offices should strengthen and stovepipes must be abolished. FAMS must continue to communicate, engage and empower its employees. And lastly, I would be remiss if I did not raise the fact just two weeks ago the Full Committee passed the Transportation Security Workforce Enhancement Act.

This bill would provide employee protections and rights to ALL employees of TSA, including the Air Marshals. All TSA workers need to have whistleblower protections in the name of security – so that they are able to report security concerns without fear of losing their jobs or retaliation.

They also deserve the right to collectively bargain over items such as uniforms, access to training, leave selection procedures and overtime – this affords them an active voice in their workplace while providing and maintaining the needed flexibility for scheduling and other matters by management.

Nearly 69,000 federal law enforcement officers currently have these rights.

I look forward to listening to our witnesses' testimony today and understanding their thoughts about the progress FAMS has made in regards to its workforce and workforce policies. But most importantly, I hope to learn and engage in a discussion on where we can all go from here.”

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