



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

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Statement of Chairman Rogers (R-AL)

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

**"A Decade After 9/11 Could American Flight Schools Still
Unknowingly Be Training Terrorists?"**

**July 18, 2012
Remarks as Prepared**

I would like to welcome everyone to this hearing and thank all of our witnesses. We look forward to your testimony and greatly appreciate your time.

Today's hearing is a sobering reminder that we cannot afford to let down our guard or become complacent about security.

It is completely unacceptable that a decade after 9/11, GAO has uncovered weaknesses in our security controls that were supposed to be fixed a decade ago.

GAO's finding is clear, and that is:

Not all foreign nationals who train to fly airplanes inside the U.S. have been properly vetted.

The Department of Homeland Security does have a program to make sure foreign nationals are vetted but that program has significant weaknesses.

First, let me say this is extremely disturbing.

According to GAO, the main cause of the problem is that TSA needs stronger internal controls and better coordination with ICE.

Here is what amazes me:

- We have a TWIC program that charges \$130 to every American trucker for a security background check to drive onto a port.
- We have cancer patients, Iraq-war veterans, and Nobel Peace Prize Winners, all forced to undergo rigorous security checks before getting on an airplane.
- At the same time, there are foreign nationals in the U.S. training to fly, just like Mohamed Atta and the other 9/11 hijackers did, and not all of them are necessarily getting a security background check.
- Is that risk-based security? I don't think so.

Two years ago at a Boston-area flight school, ICE discovered 25 illegal immigrants were enrolled and taking flight lessons.

The owner of the flight school was also in the country illegally.

But surprisingly, the individuals had been approved by TSA to take flight lessons, despite their immigration status.

So, the same Department that gave 25 foreign nationals the green light to take flight lessons ended up investigating those 25 for being here illegally.

Some improvements were made after the Boston incident. But there are still big gaps, as GAO's report shows.

According to GAO, some foreign nationals who should not get approved do, as in the Boston case just mentioned.

Some circumvent the vetting process altogether.

If foreign nationals don't go through the program, TSA and ICE don't know they are flying.

I have no doubt that the majority of people at DHS and those who operate flight schools in the U.S. are dedicated to security and are doing the best they can.

But the fact is we must do better.

I expect the Department of Homeland Security to provide a concrete timeline today for implementing GAO's recommendations.

The Department needs to be smarter about security. I believe this is just one of many examples of that.