



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Katko (R-N.Y.)  
Subcommittee on Transportation Security**

**“How TSA Can Improve Aviation Worker Vetting”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

I would like to welcome everyone to today’s hearing on how TSA can improve aviation worker vetting. Since the start of this Congress, my subcommittee has actively examined a number of alarming aspects related to TSA’s operations, policies, and procedures. Through hearings, oversight inquiries, and legislation, I have been working to get to the bottom of these issues and raise awareness of the urgent need to fix them. Recent revelations that the TSA cleared for employment individuals with potential ties to terrorism demonstrate the dire need for improved, streamlined procedures at the TSA.

The findings released by the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General over the last few weeks are alarming. In May, the Inspector General released a report that found that TSA did not have the appropriate controls in place to ensure that screening equipment has necessary maintenance work performed. A few weeks ago news outlets reported test results showing that screeners failed to detect prohibited threat items 96% of the time, and just last week we learned that 73 airport employees with potential ties to terrorism were issued credentials granting them access to work in the secure areas of our nation’s airports. These more recent findings come on the heels of revelations earlier this year of security breaches by employees at major U.S. airports involving a nationwide gun-smuggling ring and an employee of the FAA bypassing security and flying with a loaded firearm using his SIDA badge. All of these findings individually are concerning, and, in the aggregate, shake public confidence and only further demonstrate the need for steady leadership at TSA to work through the many issues that plague the Agency.

This Committee will continue to lead efforts to close security loopholes and ensure the continuing safety and security of our nation’s aviation system. The purpose of today’s hearing is to thoroughly examine the identified security gaps highlighted in the most recent IG report about aviation worker vetting and find ways to improve the vetting process to ensure that these vulnerabilities are addressed and the American people can feel safe and secure when traveling.

Aviation workers are supposed to be thoroughly vetted, due to their continuing access to sensitive areas of airports and the fact they hold a position of trust within the transportation system. However, the IG report found significant shortfalls in the vetting policies for aviation workers. For example, the IG found that TSA does not have access to all of the data it may need to thoroughly check an aviation worker's potential ties to terrorism. However, what is even more alarming is that a memo was sent to the TSA Administrator last year noting the need for additional information, and TSA has still yet to resolve this gap. The report also found that airports do not match the expiration date of an employee's credential to the expiration of their legal work authorization in the United States. Again, while TSA stated they are working to resolve this issue by the end of the calendar year, it raises serious concerns that this gap exists in the first place.

That is why I have sponsored H.R. 2750, the Improved Security Vetting for Aviation Workers Act of 2015, which I introduced last week, along with Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Rice and Congressman Payne to close these security gaps, and ensure the safety and security of the transportation networks.

The reality is that in this post 9/11 world, the terrorist threat is metastasizing and we, as a nation, must remain responsive to any holes in the security of our transportation systems and ensure that the protocols keep pace with the ever-evolving threat landscape. Improving the vetting of the aviation workers who have access to these sensitive areas of airports can help close another backdoor vulnerability at our nation's airports.

At today's hearing, we have representatives from TSA, the DHS Inspector General and GAO to address how the recommendations highlighted in the report can be implemented and what tools are needed to improve the security at our nation's airports. I look forward to hearing their testimony and having a meaningful dialogue on how we can better protect this vital transportation mode and keep aviation safe and secure for the American people.

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