



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas)  
Committee on Homeland Security  
“TSA’s SPOT Program and Initial Lessons from the LAX Shooting”**

**Chairman McCaul:** Two weeks ago, a lone gunman carried out a senseless and shocking act of violence at Los Angeles International Airport, targeting Transportation Security Officers. The individual who carried out this vicious assault took one life and wounded three others. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families during this difficult time.

What this incident demonstrates, once again, is just how vulnerable public spaces can be to those who wish to carry out attacks.

The swift response by local law enforcement is laudable. However, there are still some unanswered questions about the shooting itself. A week after the incident took place, I was surprised to learn that the police officer assigned to patrol around this security checkpoint at LAX may not have been in the correct vicinity of the checkpoint to immediately respond when shots were fired. To me this is very significant.

While we have since been told the officer may have, in fact, been within the required 3-minute radius of the checkpoint, this issue does raise new questions about the response protocols currently in place and how they work.

More importantly, in the chaos of evacuating the checkpoint, which no doubt saved many lives, according to the airport operator, no one at the screening checkpoint pushed the panic button that is supposed to be used in these situations to alert local authorities. A landline at the checkpoint was almost used by a TSO to communicate with police, but the phone was understandably abandoned during the evacuation because it wasn’t mobile. Police responded based on a phone call from an airline contractor rather than TSA.

The response to the LAX shooting, by all accounts, was swift and successful. Local police, TSA personnel, and the medical personnel who responded deserve tremendous praise.

Having said that, terrorists are constantly looking for vulnerabilities in our system. We must do everything we can to secure the perimeter of airports, ensure robust coordination and communication systems are in place between local law enforcement and TSA, and use limited resources effectively, at airports across the United States.

While the response from local authorities undoubtedly saved lives, the gunman had four unobstructed minutes – four minutes in a time like this is a long time and with 150 rounds it’s extraordinary more lives were not taken.

He had four unobstructed minutes to wreak havoc in one of the largest, busiest airports in the country. If his goal was to produce mass casualties, rather than target TSA personnel, the outcome would have been more severe. Several questions come to mind in light of this incident:

- Are emergency response times at airports adequate?
- Does TSA have appropriate plans and means to communicate with law enforcement in the event a checkpoint is evacuated?
- Fortunately, LAX had recently exercised for this type of situation just weeks before this event.

I am pleased that TSA will be undertaking a review to see what lessons can be learned from LAX, and I look forward to discussing the results of that review.

I also encourage TSA to fully engage stakeholders as part of its review. Private industry obviously has a significant role to play when it comes to securing airports and airplanes from bad actors.

In addition, today's hearing is an opportunity to examine some of the findings in GAO's most recent report on TSA's Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques Program, commonly referred to as SPOT. I had the opportunity to observe this program firsthand a few years ago, during a visit to Boston Logan Airport on the anniversary of 9/11.

However, the results of GAO's study are less-than-favorable. GAO recommends that TSA limit future funding for the program until an accurate study is completed that supports using behavioral indicators to identify threats to aviation. Based on TSA's own plans, it will be at least three years before we can begin measuring the effectiveness of SPOT.

I know TSA disagrees with GAO's findings, and argues that SPOT is risk-based, which I think is a good premise. I would like to hear TSA's explanation and the information used to support it.

Frankly, I am disappointed with the findings of the report because I believe there is value in assessing behavior in the aviation environment. There are centuries-old techniques and tools of law enforcement and other security organizations, including Israel, that allow individuals to assess behavior; but if this program isn't working, we need to find something that will work more effectively.

I am concerned that TSA will continue to spin its wheels with this program instead of developing a more effective and efficient approach. I hope I am wrong on that point.

I look forward to not only discussing GAO and DHS IG recommendations for this program, but also whether there are better ways of integrating behavior analysis into aviation security, perhaps by reinforcing local law enforcement, or other alternative approaches.

I also look forward to discussing the elements of TSA's review of the LAX shooting. The bottom line is we need to do all that we can to protect our aviation system, and to evolve our security measures just as the threats against us are evolving.

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