

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Intelligence Sharing and Terrorist Travel: How DHS Addresses the Mission of Providing Security, Facilitating Commerce and Protecting Privacy for Passengers Engaged in International Travel***

October 5, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Intelligence Sharing and Terrorist Travel: How DHS Addresses the Mission of Providing Security, Facilitating Commerce and Protecting Privacy for Passengers Engaged in International Travel”:

“In the aviation environment, obtaining and sharing traveler information quickly and efficiently is vital in tracking the movements of potential terrorists and preventing them from entering this country. Congress gave the Department of Homeland Security the responsibility of collecting traveler information for all flights originating abroad and bound for the United States.

The need to obtain this kind of information - called Passenger Name Record Data - from international travelers and use it to “connect the dots” became evident on Christmas Day 2009. When the Al Qaeda plotter boarded a plane in Amsterdam heading for Detroit, CBP Officials already information about him. CBP planned on questioning him when he reached the United States. Unfortunately, CBP didn’t anticipate a mid-air detonation attempt. Following the Christmas Day plot, CBP instituted pre-departure, rather than in-flight, screening of travelers into the United States. I am pleased that CBP learned the lesson and no lives were lost.

This common sense change represents the kind of reform we should all be able to support. However, the United States cannot take the necessary steps to achieve these kinds of common sense safety precautions alone. To secure an international aviation environment, we need the help, cooperation and collaboration of our international partners.

Two weeks ago, this Committee passed House Resolution 255, which supports the basic tenet that the U.S. must reach an agreement with the European Union on sharing Passenger Name Record Data. This agreement, which was the result of extended and focused negotiations, is likely to be considered by the European Parliament very shortly.

While we are here today to learn more about the details of this agreement, we must be certain that our words do not disrupt this process. I am confident that all parties share a desire to achieve an agreement that increases safety and security in airline travel, does not undermine privacy protections and embodies our shared tradition of individual rights.

Mr. Chairman, we must not allow terrorism to diminish the need to respect the institutions of our allies or the principles that have formed the cornerstone of our democracy. As we await action from our colleagues in the European Union, I am confident that they will approve an agreement that promotes our common interests.”

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