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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

TSA Reform: Exploring Innovations in Technology Procurement to Stimulate Job Growth Part Two

October 13, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing entitled “TSA Reform: Exploring Innovations in Technology Procurement to Stimulate Job Growth Part Two”:

“Mr. Chairman, last week TSA announced its plans to reorganize. Given the impending re-alignment of the internal functions of this major agency, I look forward to hearing from TSA at the next hearing about how these proposed changes will improve the efficiency of its procurement operations.

Today, we will hear from industry about their need to obtain additional design and equipment specifications from TSA.

As we know, the Federal Acquisitions Regulations limit how much information can be shared before a contract is announced.

However, once a contract is announced and there is fair and open competition, information can be shared. Legitimate efforts to prevent unfair advantage should not turn the procurement process into a game of hide and seek.

Yet, we know for many prospective vendors, the pursuit of a TSA contract can be worse than a game—it can become a cruel hoax.

But judging from the testimony we heard at the last hearing, the procurement problems at TSA begin long before the contract is announced.

At our last hearing, GAO testified about TSA’s technology to screen checked baggage. As we know, this Committee and the 9/11 Commission embraced 100% screening for checked bags.

Since the bombing of the plane over Lockerbie, we have known about the dangers of explosives in check bags. This was a threat long before 911.

In July, GAO reported that TSA was collecting explosive test data at the same time it was buying new baggage screening machines and necessary upgrades.

I am glad that GAO gave TSA the common sense recommendation that it collect the data before purchasing the machines.

The point of gathering data before you make decisions is to improve your decision-making. Gathering data while you are making decisions only leads to waste. In the federal procurement process, buying before deciding on all the contract requirements usually leads to mistakes.

And while this and other examples of ineffective contracting processes trouble me, I know we must shift our focus away from the failure of individual products. We must focus on the failure of

the procurement process.

At our last hearing, one of the witnesses suggested the increased use of outsourcing as a way to provide additional contract support. As the expression goes—been there, done that.

Multiple studies have concluded that the use of outsourcing for service contracts increases costs and doesn't provide better outcomes. One of our witnesses today will discuss the government's increased use of service contracts.

Unfortunately, the use of service contracts account for more spending at DHS than contracts to buy products. I don't think that is a trend we need to continue.

Mr. Chairman, I am hopeful that TSA's recent reorganization will address some of the problems that GAO and others have identified. I look forward to hearing from them next month.

Today, I look forward to hearing from the private sector about the challenges they face in doing business with TSA.”

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