

**Opening Statement of the Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security**

Eleven Years After 9/11 Can TSA Evolve To Meet the Next Terrorist Threat?

September 11, 2012

I would like to take this opportunity to first thank the Chairman for holding such an important hearing, on the anniversary of September 11th. This hearing should commemorate the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives to save others and acknowledge the families who must live with the grief of losing a loved one to such a terrible event.

This nation must never forget the violent events that transpired 11 years ago. Mr. Chairman, I respectfully ask that you afford us a moment of silence to honor all the fallen heroes from September 11th.

September 11th brings about a number of sad and regrettable images to mind. While there was fear after the attack, we must never forget the self-sacrifice and bravery which also came to the forefront.

In the midst of tragedy and trauma, the American community came together to mourn, to comfort, to help and to hope. Someone once said, that in America, when bad things happen, people run toward each other, not away from each other.

The American public demonstrated a resilient character, filled with valor and dedication to rebuild our strength and ensure that aviation security would become a priority for the Federal government. Congress established the 9/11 Commission to conduct a thoughtful evaluation and identify vulnerabilities across our security policies. Soon after the findings were published by the Commission, we passed legislation based on the Commission's recommendations.

We must all remember that in the wake of 9/11, our first step was the creation of TSA and the replacement of contract guards with Federal employees at the nation's airport checkpoints. The American public had to be assured that each passenger would be screened and each bag would be checked.

We owed it to the 3,000 people who died that day to assure that such a tragic event will not happen again.

Today we will receive testimony from non-Government witnesses discussing the steps TSA has taken to date to ensure that its mission, to secure our transportation systems, is being met.

In particular, I look forward to hearing from GAO. GAO's audits, as requested by the Ranking Member of the Full Committee and myself, have provided us with a compass to better gauge TSA's direction and progress in meeting its mission. Specifically, GAO will share information about the vulnerabilities that remain.

TSA is not perfect. There is room for improvement. However, as Congress, we have the responsibility to not make drastic decisions in haste just because we feel TSA is taking a step in the wrong direction. It is our responsibility to get the facts, conduct oversight, and develop authorizing language that improves ongoing programs at TSA.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that we can work together again soon, and mark-up the TSA Authorization bill at the Full Committee level. This will ensure that we integrate key findings and lessons learned from audits conducted by GAO and the Inspector General into the TSA organization framework.

Eleven years later the American public has not forgotten why we are here today and neither have I.

I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to remember September 11th, and ensure that we make progress in securing our aviation security and not revert to the flawed system that allowed the 9/11 high-jackers to infiltrate our aviation system and kill thousands of our citizens.