

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Utilizing Canine Teams to Detect Explosives and Mitigate Threats***

June 24, 2013 (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 “Utilizing Canine Teams to Detect Explosives and Mitigate Threats”:

“In a time of shrinking budgets, TSA’s canine program has the unusual distinction of having received increases in funding since Fiscal Year 2010. This year, TSA will spend \$126 million to deploy canines to airports and mass transit hubs across the country. Increases in funding for TSA’s canine program can be directly attributed to TSA’s decision in 2011 to begin using canines to screen passengers and their property at airports.

Unfortunately, as the Government Accountability Office detailed in its report last year, TSA faced several challenges in its initial deployment of passenger screening canines. According to GAO, TSA failed to deploy passenger screening canine teams in a risk-based fashion and did not fully assess their effectiveness prior to placing them into the field.

While TSA has passenger screening canine teams placed at the most high-risk airports across the country today, a comprehensive assessment of their effectiveness has still not been conducted. Specifically, TSA has resisted GAO’s recommendation that the agency conduct tests to determine whether passenger screening canines are more effective at identifying explosives on passengers than traditional, less costly, explosive detection canines.

Without conducting the assessment recommended by GAO, we can have no way of knowing whether the additional \$18,000 per-team TSA is paying for passenger screening canines is money well-spent. With 144 passenger screening canine teams currently deployed, that extra \$18,000 in start-up costs for each passenger screening canine team has already cost taxpayers more than \$2.5 million. That is \$2.5 million that TSA has no way of assuring us has been spent on a superior product.

I look forward to hearing from TSA today regarding their plans to address all of GAO’s recommendations regarding passenger screening canines. I am also eager to hear from TSA about how canines serve as a better tool for reducing risk in the passenger screening environment than less costly alternatives, such as explosive trace detection technology.

At some airports, TSA uses canines as part of its Managed Inclusion program. At others, it uses explosive trace detection technology for the same program and purpose. It must be asked, if the explosive trace detection technology is as effective at screening passengers for explosives as canines, why is the less costly alternative not being used exclusively?

Before yielding back, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Connell’s suggestion in his prepared testimony that TSA allow third-party canine teams to screen cargo carried on passenger aircraft. The 9/11 Act authorized TSA to approve the use of canines for screening cargo carried on passenger aircraft. It is my understanding that TSA is not opposed to allowing third-party canine teams to screen cargo on policy grounds but has concerns about the costs associated with performing oversight of such a regime.

I look forward to hearing from TSA regarding the anticipated cost associated with overseeing third-party canine screening. I am also eager to hear from Mr. Connell regarding how industry may be willing to offset the cost to taxpayers associated with the necessary Federal oversight of third-party private sector canine screening of cargo.”

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