

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Examining TSA's Management of the Screening Partnership Program***

July 29, 2014 (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 “Examining TSA’s Management of the Screening Partnership Program”:

“I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee to discuss the Transportation Security Administration’s Screening Partnership Program. The program at issue today, which affords airports the opportunity to return to the pre-9/11 model of using contract employees to screen passengers and baggage at our nation’s airports, tends to evoke strong passion on both sides of the aisle.

After 9/11 it was clear to the vast majority of Members of Congress and the Bush Administration that transitioning to a Federal screener workforce was the right thing to do for the security of our nation.

And, it worked. There has not been a successful attack against our aviation system on U.S. soil since 9/11. Despite that fact, Republican calls for returning to a contract screener workforce have increased in recent years.

Indeed, in 2012, the Platform adopted during the Republican National Convention called for the private sector to take over airport screening wherever feasible. Some on the other side of the aisle claim that transitioning to a contract workforce results in more efficient and friendlier screeners.

This claim simply does not stand up to scrutiny. What actually happens when an airport chooses to use contract screeners is that the very same Transportation Security Officers working at the airport are recruited by the private screening company that is awarded the contract.

One day they are Federal employees with the associated benefits and employment protections and the next they are employees of a corporation, likely headquartered in a far-away state, without the security of a Federal pension in later years. How that could make the screeners more effective, efficient, or friendly is beyond comprehension.

I look forward to hearing what National President Cox has to say about Transportation Security Officers that have recently been recruited by the company that has been awarded the contract to conduct screening services at four airports in Montana. I also look forward to hearing from Mr. Cox about the strain placed on screeners when they are informed that the airport they work at will be transitioning to a contract screener workforce.

In 2012, the Government Accountability Office issued a report highlighting deficiencies in TSA’s management of the Screening Partnership Program. I look forward to hearing from Ms. Grover on the steps TSA has taken to improve the management of the program and implement GAO’s recommendations. Specifically, I will be interested in understanding whether TSA is providing airports that inquire about the program the information they need to make an informed decision about whether and how to apply to the program.

As for Mr. Benner, I am deeply concerned with TSA's recent decision to rebuke the Department of Labor and insist that the agency will not include prevailing wage requirements in SPP contracts. The Department of Labor directed TSA to include prevailing wage requirements in SPP contracts in June of 2013. I will be interested in hearing from Mr. Benner about why it took TSA over a year to respond to the Department of Labor and why the agency continues to ignore the directive.

Finally, I would like to point out that many of the changes made to the law controlling for entry into the Screening Partnership Program in the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 were ill-informed and should be repealed. Chief among those is the provision allowing for subsidiaries of foreign-owned corporations to compete for and be awarded contracts for screening services.

Earlier this congress, I, along with Ranking Members Richmond and Lowey introduced the Contract Screener Reform and Accountability Act which would reinstate the law stipulating that a company could only get a contract for screening services if it was owned and controlled by a U.S. citizen."

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