

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

**Hearing - “Reform and Improvement: Assessing the Path Forward for the
Transportation Security Administration”**

October 8, 2015

Administrator Neffenger, while you’ve only been in this position since June, you’ve demonstrated a real commitment to work constructively with us as you take on the challenges facing TSA, and I thank you for that.

Finally, I want to thank Inspector General Roth for being here today and for the work you have done and continue to do to identify vulnerabilities within TSA and advise us on what we can do to enhance the security of our commercial aviation sector.

Your most recent report, which is classified, concerns covert tests conducted by undercover DHS investigators who attempted to smuggle prohibited items – including weapons and mock explosives – past TSA airport security checkpoints.

As we all know, the results of these covert tests were leaked to the media in June, before the report was complete, and it was reported that in 67 out of 70 tests, TSA failed to detect these items and allowed the investigators to proceed past the checkpoint. 67 out of 70 – that’s 96 percent.

I think we can all agree that 96 percent is an alarming figure, and one that we cannot overlook.

We have to assess all of the findings and recommendations in your report, we have to shine a light on the vulnerabilities that these covert tests have exposed, and we have to take action to eliminate those vulnerabilities.

We know that the threats to this country, particularly to our aviation sector, are constant. We know those threats are evolving and becoming more sophisticated, that the people who want to do us harm are always on the watch for a new way in, a new way to beat the system.

That’s why we have to be even more vigilant, that’s why we conduct these tests – because we know that no matter how good our security might be, it can be better. It can always be better – and the findings in this report make it clear that it can and must be much better in order to match the threats we face today.

So I’m eager to hear how our witnesses are working together to act on these findings, implement reforms, and close the gaps that these covert tests uncovered.

I know that Administrator Neffenger has been in his position for only a few months, and that many of the topics and reports that Inspector General Roth has compiled predate the Administrator’s time at TSA.

But I certainly look forward to hearing what TSA is doing in response to this most recent report. And if Inspector General Roth has previously identified other security gaps or vulnerabilities that TSA must still address, I would like to learn about those efforts as well.