

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Long Lines, Short Patience: Local Perspectives***

May 26, 2016 (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 “Long Lines, Short Patience: Local Perspectives”:

“Yesterday, we heard from Administrator Neffenger on the multi-pronged challenge of airport security wait times. From his testimony, it seems that TSA is making steady progress towards improving wait times given TSA’s limited resources.

I was pleased to learn from TSA that, system-wide, wait times average at about 20 minutes and at the seven major airports of concern, wait times are averaging at about 40 minutes. To the aviation stakeholders here today, I look forward to a constructive and candid discussion.

I have been disappointed to see some airport authorities, who are frustrated with TSA staffing shortages at their airports, say they would consider ‘opting-out’ of Federal TSA screening altogether.

Increasingly, security experts warn that replacing Federal screeners with private contractors would yield limited, if any, benefits, explaining that the factors behind the wait times crisis are complex.

I am particularly interested in your assessment of how TSA is responding to the wait-times crisis.

I am also interested in discussing long-term strategies and solutions to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of checkpoint screening.

I thank American Airlines for sending a representative to participate in this discussion. We know that some airlines have stepped up to help give support to the checkpoint to help with this issue.

There has also been a fair bit of interest in having carriers eliminate baggage fees, which have been identified as a contributing factor to increased carry-on baggage volume at TSA’s checkpoints.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and your ideas, as a customer service expert, on what longer-term actions could be taken to improve the TSA security screening experience.

It is important that President Cox of the American Federation of Government Employees is here. As the representative for the men and women who serve on the front lines at our Nation’s airports, you have an important perspective to share.

What often gets lost in all of these conversations is that the men and women on the front lines of our aviation security efforts perform a thankless job.

They work day-in and day-out to ensure that the traveling public is safe. Unfortunately, they also receive the blame for long wait times in many instances. They screen a public that is seemingly frustrated with them when they are simply doing their jobs - and doing them well.

It is my hope that the discussions in these back-to-back hearings will help give shape to long-term approaches to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of aviation security screening.

Administrator Neffenger is to be commended for taking actions to respond to the crisis with the resources he has. However, TSA needs an infusion of new resources to make sustained and

measurable improvements.

The 2013 Budget Act required TSA to divert \$13 billion over ten years to deficit reduction. As a result, this year, \$1.25 billion was diverted from TSA that otherwise would have been reinvested in the aviation security system—as the American flying public, who pay these fees, expect.

I am working with Representative Peter DeFazio, the Ranking Member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, on this effort. It is my hope that a broad coalition will support the efforts to ensure that TSA can retain those fees.”

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