

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Services Hearing

Raising the Standard: DHS's Efforts to Improve Aviation Security Around the Globe

September 26, 2017

This year, there have been a series of thwarted terrorist plots that underscore the diverse nature of the threat to aviation. We know that when the Department of Homeland Security issues an aviation security directive, the entire world reacts. It is important that this Subcommittee continue its robust oversight of DHS' efforts to raise baseline security at overseas airports. Over the past decade, TSA and CBP have played central roles in these efforts.

The Obama Administration expanded CBP's Preclearance Program to help the Department of Homeland Security identify terrorists, criminals and other security threats prior to boarding passenger planes. Additionally, under President Obama's leadership, DHS pushed out policies that improved security for U.S.-bound flights, principally through active engagement with the international body that oversees standards for civil aviation. It is imperative that Congress and the Department of Homeland Security build on the gains made under the Obama Administration to advance aviation security.

The recent aviation threats posed by large personal electronic devices and the foiled Australian airplane attack demonstrate that we cannot place 9/11, subsequent attacks, and thwarted plots in the rear view mirror. We must continue to move forward.

In moving forward, Congress has a responsibility to prioritize agency spending. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle should familiarize themselves with the phrase "opportunity cost." For every dollar that is diverted to erecting the politically motivated Border Wall, there are fewer resources for doing vital REAL security work, like international engagement on aviation security or surface transportation security. As stewards of the taxpayer dollars, we have a duty to put valuable taxpayer resources in the areas of greatest need. Providing adequate resources is paramount to allowing TSA to quickly respond to threats.

I hope to hear more today about where the agency's needs are as well as how they have adjusted to the recent threats. I look forward to hearing from CBP about their Preclearance program and plans for the future. The Obama Administration planned to expand the program by ten new foreign airports, but it is unclear whether President Trump has any interest in growing this security program.

Finally, I am pleased to see GAO participating in today's hearing. GAO has been a steady source for Congress as we learn more about security for last points of departure airports. Their contribution to today's hearing is invaluable and I look forward to engaging with GAO about their findings and issues for Congress to consider.