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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Insider Threats to Aviation Security: Airline and Airport Perspectives

Subcommittee on Transportation & Protective Security

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Today's hearing is timely given recent events. Twice in the last two months, unauthorized individuals have accessed cockpits of passenger jets.

In the first case, a ground crew worker at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport was able to commandeer an unoccupied plane, take off from the airport, and fly around the Seattle-Tacoma area for an hour before crashing in a wooded area, killing only himself.

In the second case, a student pilot with unclear intentions was able to hop a fence at Orlando-Melbourne International Airport and gain entry to an airplane cockpit before being tackled and detained by two workers who happened to be on the plane.

While the details of these events are still being investigated, it is clear that a major loss of life was prevented by sheer luck—and by the heroism of the two workers who acted bravely and selflessly to prevent catastrophe.

These events are the latest in a string of incidents displaying the challenges the aviation industry faces in controlling access to secure areas and aircrafts.

Each incident is unique and highlights slightly different vulnerabilities depending on the people and airport involved.

Given the complexity of the aviation system, no single solution will serve as a “silver bullet” to ensure sufficient security.

Instead, the TSA, airports, airlines, and other stakeholders must work collaboratively to develop and implement layered security measures that address security gaps and reduce risk as much as possible.

The Airport Perimeter and Access Control Security Act, introduced by Congressman Keating, will go a long way in directing that work by requiring TSA to update its risk assessments and strategies for perimeter security and access controls.

I was happy to see that bill included in the FAA Reauthorization Act that passed the House yesterday, along with eight other Democratic bills and numerous other provisions that will strengthen TSA's security efforts across all modes of transportation.

Today, I hope to gain additional perspective on recent security incidents and learn from our witnesses what this Committee can do to further support their security efforts.

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