

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation Security Committee on Homeland Security

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We are here today to mark up three important bills that I believe implement common sense approaches to improving processes that form the foundation of our layered approach to security.

Last week, this Subcommittee held a legislative hearing to discuss the “MODERN Security Credentials Act” that you have introduced. I commend you for holding a legislative hearing on that bill.

I know you share my commitment to ensuring that nothing we do here adversely impacts employment opportunities for workers or raises credentialing costs for industry.

At the hearing, you pledged last week to work with me and my colleagues on this side of the aisle to address our concerns, and that is exactly what happened.

The Amendment that you are offering today represents true collaboration.

Together, we have developed legislation that will promote efficiency in vetting and, in turn, help workers and their employers realize the benefits of those efficiencies.

I am particularly pleased that Chairman Rogers’ amendment authorizes an industry task force to produce recommendations for TSA and Congress on how to proceed with further security credential harmonization efforts.

I believe there is a way to harmonize and streamline the security threat assessment process; however, since this process involves federal and private sector stakeholders, I feel that their input is essential in crafting policies that will protect workers, reduce costs and improve security.

I think we can agree that these are our common goals, and I think the language we have before us today establishes a process for developing good policies and programs in this area.

Additionally, I am pleased that the amendment strikes language on “disqualifying offenses” that could potentially have unintended negative consequences for transportation workers and, instead, charges the task force with responsibility to look at the issue.

There is, however, one area of unfinished business from the legislative hearing—competition in the data - channeling marketplace.

I strongly believe that this is an area for “full and open competition.” Further, I have serious misgivings about TSA’s plans to sole-source enrollment services to one firm.

Any businessman will tell you that competition spurs innovation, improves the quality of services, and brings down costs.

As H.R. 1690 moves forward, I hope to work with you to seize the opportunity to put TSA on a path to competition.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank you for considering my TSA Ombudsman Act, H.R. 1165, which codifies the Office of the Ombudsman and establishes a direct report between the Ombudsman and the TSA Administrator.

TSA employees are on the front lines of our Nation's fight to protect the homeland, yet since TSA's inception, high attrition and low morale have plagued the agency, particularly among the approximately 46,000 Transportation Security Officers responsible for screening two million air passengers each day.

Part of the reason for the low morale among the TSA workforce is a lack of a mechanism to address problematic workplace issues.

H.R. 1165 incorporates recommendations by the Inspector General to strengthen this office and is based upon months of oversight by this Committee.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my support for Mr. Cravaack's bill, H.R. 1801, which establishes a plan for expedited screening of military personnel at airport security checkpoints.

I supported this language as an amendment to the Transportation Security Administration Authorization Act passed in the last Congress, and I support it today.

This legislation properly recognizes the preciousness of time to the patriotic military men and women in our military.