



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Katko (R-NY) Transportation and Protective Security Subcommittee

"The Future of the Transportation Security Administration"
February 2, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to welcome everyone to the Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security's first hearing of the 115th Congress. I am grateful to my constituents for giving me the opportunity and privilege to return to Congress and continue to Chair this important Subcommittee. This Committee has a proven track record of working together to advance long term, common sense strategic reforms to the Department of Homeland Security. While there may be divisions and discord elsewhere, here in this room, we all share an unshakable commitment to ensuring the security of the traveling public, because we know that the consequences of failure are too great.

The Transportation Security Administration was founded just weeks after 9/11. Congress did what it does best-it reacted to a crisis and threw money at a problem. Here we are nearly sixteen years later, the American taxpayer has spent billions of dollars, and it is clear that TSA is long overdue for an overhaul. The agency has long been plagued with uncertainty and a lack of leadership. Since 2014, TSA has had six different administrators leading the agency. While we have been able to advance legislation to address many of the challenges that TSA faces, it is incumbent upon us to provide clearer direction and intent for this often troubled agency in the form of a full scale reauthorization, and find a way to limit the revolving door of leadership. Without continuity at the top, it is impossible for any organization to successfully implement a long term strategic vision. Instead, we have all been left with the many fits and starts of the last few years.

Under former Administrator Neffenger, TSA began to move in the right direction. A new training and education program was put into place for all front-line employees, emphasis was placed on engagement with the private sector and TSA launched an Innovation Task Force to seek out new technologies. While these were important first steps, they did not go far enough, and now many of these potentially transformative initiatives are left to languish or disappear altogether with yet another change in leadership when the President names a new Administrator. It would be wise for the new Administrator to continue to build upon many of these positive changes initiated by Admiral Neffenger. When confirmed, he or she will have an eager partner in this Subcommittee, to help garner Congressional support for reform and improvement within the agency.

Over the last year, we saw record breaking numbers of Americans traveling; unfortunately TSA was ill-prepared for the volume of travelers and was caught flat footed. At the height of the wait times crisis, news coverage around the country showed passengers, stranded at airports overnight due to long TSA wait lines, sleeping on cots. The number of passengers will continue to increase, and we must ensure TSA is prepared to effectively and efficiently screen passengers.

Simultaneously, TSA must focus on working with its state and local partners to keep all areas of our airports safe and secure. This issue was front and center on January 7th, when a disturbed individual opened fire in the baggage claim area at the Hollywood-Fort Lauderdale International Airport. The incident resulted in the loss of five lives and scores of injuries. Air traffic was brought to a halt as law enforcement officials and first-responders rushed to contain the situation. This tragic incident served as a stark reminder of the threats facing our nation's aviation system.

Although TSA is one of the youngest agencies in the federal government, it has come to operate as an entrenched federal bureaucracy. This means that often times it fails to achieve important efficiencies, and it lacks the flexibility to respond to an ever-changing threat landscape. I believe that with the start of this new Administration, we have a unique opportunity to affect positive change at TSA.

The purpose of our hearing today is to look forward. We will hear from the many willing and ready partners TSA has to help inform us what innovations and efficiencies TSA could better leverage to enhance its ability to achieve its critical mission. The private sector is the primary engine of innovation and efficiency in the U.S. economy. The Department of Homeland Security and TSA must look to them for best practices and new technologies that can simultaneously improve aviation security and passenger experience. I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today, on the specific reforms necessary to advance TSA and make the traveling public safer.

I would like to thank all of you for being here today and with that; I am pleased to recognize the new Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the Gentlelady from New Jersey, Ms. Watson Coleman, for her opening statement.

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