



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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

“Checkpoint of the Future: Evaluating TSA’s Innovation Task Force”
April 27, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to welcome everyone to the Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security’s hearing to examine the state of TSA’s Innovation Task Force initiative. Many of us here are all too familiar with the struggles TSA has faced over its 15 year history to field cutting edge technology and security solutions to meet the ever evolving threat landscape.

A year ago, then-Administrator Neffenger launched the Innovation Task Force initiative in an effort to inculcate a culture of innovation into how the organization thinks about meeting the challenges of current and evolving threats. I commend the former Administrator for starting this critical effort, and I support the important mission of this initiative.

However, it is this Committee’s job to make sure that this task force is meeting its stated goals, and has the resources it needs. With effective oversight, we can all work together to ensure that the positive momentum created by the Innovation Task Force initiative continues and that the lessons learned are not confined to a vacuum, but instead both support and inform the broader mission and goals of TSA as a whole. What is most important is that TSA leverages the work of this initiative to guarantee to the American people that future procurement decisions are a sound investment of taxpayer dollars and that the technology TSA procures is capable of detecting the latest threat.

While the federal government is ultimately responsible for delivering on the secure freedom of movement throughout the nation’s transportation systems, the effectiveness of the security framework surrounding that movement hinges on the private sector’s commitment to innovation and continuous development of new security technologies to screen millions of passengers and bags every day.

However, quality innovation comes with a hefty price tag, and we cannot reasonably expect the private sector to spend millions of dollars in the research and development of new and emerging technologies without greater transparency and communication from both TSA and the Department of Homeland Security.

Currently, TSA is focusing on deploying Automated Screening Lanes, across 21 of the nation’s largest airports. Automated Screening Lanes should help to reduce passenger queues at the checkpoint. As we have seen with recent attacks around the world, terrorists are increasingly targeting public spaces with large crowds of people to inflict the maximum number of casualties.

Thus, the Automated Screening Lanes can serve to enhance the passenger experience, ease the burden on TSOs, and eliminate security vulnerabilities. When thinking about how to build the checkpoint of the future, TSA should strive to meet all three of these goals when acquiring new technology and proposing new solutions.

However, to accomplish this we need to reach far beyond Automated Screening Lanes. This is why I am pleased that the ITF has plans to pilot CT x-rays at passenger checkpoints, biometric authentication technology and innovations in passenger communication all before the end of the summer travel season.

I am also optimistic about TSA's efforts to connect industry with airport operators across the country to facilitate innovation in other aspects of transportation security outside the checkpoint—such as employee screening and biometric bag drop. However, we can and should be doing more.

All of these demonstrations and pilots will be wasted effort if they fail to inform the Administration's Strategic Five-Year Technology Investment Plan or enhance TSA's broken procurement process. I hope when the next Administrator is appointed, he or she will continue to build on the progress of this task force, and better integrate its work across TSA and DHS as a whole to leverage its successes.

I believe that we are behind the curve concerning our technology innovation and the traveler experience at our nation's airports. Many foreign airports have implemented improved security scanners, better biometric capabilities, and smarter systems for passenger queuing to meet the emerging threats of today.

I look forward to hearing the perspectives of our witnesses on how TSA and its industry partners are working together to bring more innovative solutions to transportation security, and what more needs to be done to meet this goal.

I encourage all of the witnesses today to be candid about how the scope of this initiative can be expanded, and how DHS and TSA can better support this task force.

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