



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) Homeland Security Committee

“Preventing the Next Attack: TSA’s Role in Keeping our Transportation Systems Secure”

November 8, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

Today, our Committee is meeting to discuss TSA’s role in keeping our transportation systems secure. Before we begin, I would like to welcome and thank Administrator David Pekoske (Puh-KAH-skee) for joining us this morning to discuss a range of important topics relevant to America’s aviation security.

We have just been briefed in a classified setting by the DHS Inspector General and Administrator Pekoske about specific vulnerabilities to our aviation security. Quite frankly, I found that briefing disturbing. We need to do more to confront the growing threats aimed at the aviation sector.

I want to work with you so we can remedy the situation as soon as possible and I am hopeful TSA is successful with implementing the eight recommendations that should improve screening checkpoint operational effectiveness.

While all Members on this Committee share my concerns, I want to remind everyone that the information shared and exchanged in that briefing, must remain classified.

Today, we are 16 years passed the horrendous 9/11 attacks that claimed the lives of almost 3,000 people. However, we are only 9 days passed the latest terror attack to hit downtown New York. While the latest attack was carried out with a truck instead of an airplane, it was a reminder that the threats we face are real.

Before he was killed, ISIS leader Sheik Adnani called for lone wolf attacks, begging followers to kill by any means necessary.

Today, international terrorists are still determined to spread fear by killing innocent people and destroying our way of life. And though many live on other continents, they are only one flight away.

If we are going to be successful in keeping our homeland safe, we must make sure that TSA has the tools and resources it needs to carry out its mission. We understand however, that this is no easy task. Even though there are approximately 60,000 TSA employees helping safeguard nearly 450 airports throughout the United States, our aviation sector remains the crown jewel of terrorist targets.

America's enemies only have to be right once, but we have to be right 100% of the time. With millions of people traveling into our country from all over the world, we must expeditiously implement policies and procedures that instill confidence and make our transportation system safe and secure. Fortunately, our Committee has been very dedicated to working together, with TSA, and other components within DHS to get the job done.

Over the last several years we have helped strengthen our aviation security with legislation from this Committee and then signed into law. This legislation included bills that enhance security at Last Point of Departure airports to the United States, and require emergency response and active shooter exercises for TSA personnel on a regular basis.

We also passed legislation that directs the TSA Administrator to develop and update a strategic five-year technology investment plan to report provide the private sector with a realistic roadmap of the agency's technology needs. These are certainly steps in the right direction but there is still much more that can be done. In 2015, we learned through leaked reports from the DHS Inspector General that TSA's passenger screening record was abysmal. This was very discouraging. And even though some changes have been made to correct this problem, we cannot be satisfied until we know it's been properly addressed.

But the government cannot solve this problem alone. Working with the private sector will help us find ways to meet our security needs.

These partnerships can produce new and innovative technologies that can advance our screening process, including the use of biometrics, like fingerprints and facial recognition. This will make it much harder to slip past screeners at the airport.

New technology will also strengthen our ability to keep up with emerging threats.

Taking down airplanes is a constant goal of terrorists, but how they go about trying is always changing. In late July of this year, counter-terrorism officials in Australia thwarted an attack and seized material that could have been used as an improvised explosive device (IED) to blow up a plane. We are also seeing reports that terrorists are looking for ways to use laptops and other electronic devices as bombs that will detonate on airlines.

This is a serious threat that must be addressed and I look forward to discussing how we can confront these issues head-on.

Again, I want to thank Administrator Pecoske for joining us this morning. We all look forward to working with you and the men and women of TSA who very hard to keep their fellow Americans safe and our homeland secure.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for an opening statement.

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