

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

**Opening Statement of Chairwoman Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX) as prepared
Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
Committee on Homeland Security**

Hearing:

***An Assessment of Checkpoint Security:
Are Our Airports Keeping Passengers Safe?***

We are here today to discuss how we are increasing the security of airport checkpoints in the wake of the Christmas Day terrorist attack in the skies over Detroit.

Given the risks to our aviation sector, it is imperative that we take a critical look at how DHS is integrating an effective layered security approach into our aviation security programs.

Today, we will examine DHS' processes to acquire and deploy effective passenger screening technologies and procedures. This includes the testing, evaluation, and approval of machines and equipment designed for use at airport security checkpoints.

Coordination between DHS' Science and Technology Directorate and the Transportation Security Administration is essential to ensuring that the best technology is deployed in a systematic way to address current and emerging threats to the aviation system.

The need for effective coordination was once again made plain by the incident on Christmas Day. It is clear that our adversaries still believe that our aviation sector is a point of attack and that they will develop novel approaches to carrying out their objectives. Accordingly, we must stay at least one step ahead and this coordination is an essential prerequisite for doing so.

However, the strength of coordination between TSA and S&T has been called into question by the Government Accountability Office and developers of innovative technologies.

We have heard that navigating the DHS labyrinth of testing, evaluating, and certifying technology has dissuaded the acquisition and production of cutting edge technology.

Earlier this year, I directed staff to take a close look at the relationship between TSA and S&T. This examination raised concerns about the cohesion between both components; specifically, there appeared to be an almost incoherent process for testing and deploying technologies and security protocols. Roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined and it was clear from briefings that increased oversight of this area is imperative. Components of DHS must work in tandem in order to keep the American people safe, and that is why I am happy that TSA, S&T, and GAO are here today.

Last summer, the House overwhelmingly supported H.R. 2200, an authorization bill for TSA, which included a provision mandating that TSA and S&T develop a plan to more efficiently develop, test, procure, and deploy processes and technologies to improve airport security.

This provision will ensure that both organizations are operating under the same parameters when developing measures to bolster checkpoint security.

It must be noted that the Flight 253 incident also highlighted vulnerabilities at foreign airports with direct flights to the U.S. The security at these Last Point of Departure airports is as critical to our aviation security as the security of our domestic airports.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary for her dedication to strengthening our relationship with foreign partners. This diplomacy is important to ensuring that all airports meet an acceptable standard for checkpoint security.

TSA has been working with foreign airport operators and air-carriers in implementing stronger security screening protocols, but challenges remain. Today we will hear about these international challenges and the ways to best address them.

This hearing will also afford us with an opportunity to talk about the much discussed Advanced Imaging Technology, or whole-body imaging machines. Nearly all relevant stakeholders are present today, so we will glean several important perspectives about the efficacy of AIT and the deployment plan.

The Administration has announced its intent to ultimately deploy 1,000 of these machines by the end of fiscal year 2011. While I applaud this development, this hearing will enable us to flesh out some particulars.

For example, the cost of this deployment is significant, and it brings with it the need for increased TSA personnel and potentially significant costs to modify airport terminals and checkpoints.

Today we will discuss AIT, how it fits into DHS' plan for deploying technology, and how to address the operational challenges associated with this deployment. We will also learn about the Secretary's attempts to have similar technology located abroad.

Today's hearing offers more than just an opportunity to discuss the status quo in aviation security—it is an opportunity to envision where we want to be.

Technologies have their limitations, but empowering our TSA workforce with adequate training, information, and innovative technologies will undoubtedly lead us to the next generation of checkpoint security.

I know that this is the first of many examinations of this important topic. We need the commitment and resources of government and industry to promote more efficient airport security. Accordingly, I was pleased to learn about the recent establishment of a blue-ribbon panel by the travel industry aimed at providing recommendations on how to secure the aviation sector in the 21st century.

Today's hearing affords us with an opportunity to see how we can efficiently deploy security technologies and procedures. This requires the relevant components of the Department to work together; and it also requires the Department to work with relevant stakeholders, many of which are represented here today.