

**Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
Committee on Homeland Security**

“100% Air Cargo Screening: Can We Secure America’s Skies?”

2:00 P.M. on Wednesday, March 18, 2008
311 Cannon House Office Building

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), as prepared

Today, this Subcommittee will continue its commitment to robust oversight of one of the most important issues addressed by Congress in the 9/11 Act: the screening of cargo on commercial passenger aircraft.

This is my second hearing on this issue as Chairwoman of this Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over aviation security, and we will continue to monitor TSA’s progress in screening cargo during the 111th Congress.

I look forward to engaging with my colleagues on the Subcommittee, and learning from our witnesses about how TSA and industry are working together to achieve the cargo-screening mandate.

This mandate is a critical step toward securing aviation. The Subcommittee is determined to work with the new Administration and conduct thoughtful oversight to make sure that we can move forward and complete implementation of this essential element of the 9/11 Act.

The logic is clear: If we screen passengers and their checked baggage, we must screen the other cargo onboard the same aircraft.

Section 1602 of the 9/11 Act established two deadlines: the first required screening of 50% of cargo on passenger planes by February 3, 2009; the second requires 100% screening by August 3, 2010.

The February deadline has passed; aside from receiving an email from TSA stating that it had begun to enforce the 50% screening requirement on air carriers, this Subcommittee has not received any further, more detailed confirmation that this requirement is being satisfied.

Today, we are more than a month past the deadline and I was concerned when I read GAO’s testimony, which states that TSA cannot verify that screening is being done at the mandated 50% level.

This is not to say that TSA has not been working with industry stakeholders to fulfill the section 1602 requirements. I know that it has made progress in this endeavor, but the question remains: Can TSA positively verify that 50% of cargo on passenger planes is being screened, and can this be formally reported to Congress?

Still, the most important thing is to achieve 100% screening by August 2010, and this afternoon we will also examine whether TSA is on track to meet this deadline.

The scope of this hearing includes reviewing the programs and regulations TSA has put into place in its efforts to achieve 100% cargo screening on passenger aircraft; exploring TSA compliance and verification standards for ensuring that screening is taking place; and evaluating DHS progress in certifying new and effective screening technologies. In addition, we want to know whether TSA has

adequate resources and personnel to accomplish this mission.

As we review TSA's efforts to meet the screening deadlines, we also want to understand the impact this is having on our industry partners, including air carriers, freight forwarders, and manufacturers who must make significant investments and who have the greatest stake in an effective and efficient implementation process.

Last October, TSA, in a letter to the full Committee, reported that section 1602 applies to cargo inbound from foreign countries. I am looking forward to hearing today whether TSA needs further clarification from Congress on the intent and scope of section 1602 in the 9/11 Act.

The importance of achieving 100% cargo screening cannot be understated. As such, and based on what we learn here today, I will be asking GAO to conduct a follow-up assessment for the Subcommittee to keep us informed about how the implementation process is progressing and alert us to any new hurdles that may arise. I hope that the Ranking Member, Mr. Dent, will join with me in making this request so that we can proceed in a bipartisan manner.

I would like to thank our witnesses for coming before us today and helping us to shed light on this critical endeavor. I know that much work has been done, but there is still a lot more to be accomplished in order to achieve 100% screening by next summer.

All of the witnesses today are experienced, knowledgeable veterans of the aviation industry, and I look forward to hearing from all of you and working with you to make our skies more secure.