



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

100% Air Cargo Screening: Can We Secure America's Skies?

March 18, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee hearing entitled “100% Air Cargo Screening: Can We Secure America's Skies?”:

“This afternoon's hearing will evaluate progress made by TSA in implementing the 9/11 Act's requirement to screen 100% of all cargo aboard passenger aircraft.

Section 1602 of the 9/11 Act also required TSA to screen 50% of all air cargo aboard passenger aircraft by February 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of my colleagues on this Subcommittee and the full Committee in championing this important mandate and ensuring that we take all necessary steps toward enhancing the nation's aviation security.

After all, the 9/11 Commission Report recommended that TSA “intensify its efforts to identify, track, and appropriately screen potentially dangerous cargo in aviation.”

In an effort to fulfill this recommendation, Congress has provided TSA with the necessary tools and a great deal of flexibility.

Today, I would like to know if TSA can verify that it has met the 50% deadline and whether it will be able to meet the 100% deadline next year.

Mr. Kelley, I am particularly looking forward to your testimony. I am interested in TSA's perspective on the challenges it faces in meeting the 100% deadline.

As you know, I am also interested in hearing about DHS' progress in exploring innovative technologies that can be applied to fulfill the requirements of this law.

It is important to evaluate any existing research and coordination efforts between TSA and industry. We need to ensure that the work and progress made by industry relevant to screening can be leveraged by TSA to effectively screen and detect explosives hidden in air cargo.

Today we will also hear from stakeholders who have concerns about TSA's plan to implement this mandate.

This hearing is not just about TSA checking the box; it is about strengthening aviation security and protecting the traveling public.

This hearing is being hosted well in advance of the August 2010 deadline so that we can address the concerns of government and industry stakeholders early in the process and remedy or avert potential obstacles to implementation.”

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