

**Statement of  
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Administrator  
Transportation Security Administration  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
before the  
United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Transportation Security  
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Screening Partnership Program (SPP). TSA employs risk-based, intelligence-driven operations to prevent terrorist attacks and to reduce the vulnerability of the Nation's transportation system to terrorism. Our goal at all times is to maximize transportation security to stay ahead of evolving terrorist threats while protecting passengers' privacy and facilitating the secure and efficient flow of legitimate commerce. TSA's current security measures create a multi-layered system of transportation security that identifies, manages and mitigates risk. No layer on its own solves all our challenges, but, in combination, they create a strong and formidable system.

TSA has an experienced Federal workforce that has safely screened more than 5 billion passengers since TSA was created and has established a multi-layered aviation security system reaching from the time a ticket is purchased, throughout a passenger's flight, to the time the passenger exits the secure area of their destination airport. Every day we see the effectiveness of these security measures with TSA Officers (TSO) detecting hundreds of prohibited items. In fact, over the past decade TSOs have confiscated approximately 50 million prohibited items, and last year alone TSOs prevented more than 1,200 guns from being brought onto passenger aircraft.

As our risk-based approach evolves, we must ensure that each new step we take strengthens

security. In addition to exploring new ways of focusing our attention where it is most needed, we are continually reevaluating existing programs to ensure that our resources are directed in a manner that yields the greatest level of security overall. This continued reevaluation includes the SPP.

Along with the creation of TSA itself, Congress determined that aviation security would be most effectively served by having passenger screening as a predominantly Federal responsibility. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) (P.L. 107-71) nevertheless established a privatized security screening pilot program (see 49 U.S.C. 44919). Under the pilot program, TSA was required to select five airports from five airport security risk categories, as defined by the Administrator, to participate. Screening companies that met statutory qualifications were selected to provide comparable screening services through contract with the Federal Government, using employees who met the same qualifications and were compensated at the same level as Federal Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), and who met the same rigorous security standards as those in effect at airports with Federal security staffs. In addition, ATSA established a program through which the Administrator could contract with additional qualified private screening companies for screening at other U.S. airports after completion of the pilot program (see 49 U.S.C. 44920). Under the SPP, airports may apply to TSA to have screening carried out by a qualified private screening company. As with the pilot program, private screeners must meet the same qualifications as TSOs and must be provided compensation and benefits at a level equal to or greater than the compensation and benefits provided to TSOs. Still, regardless of whether an airport has private or federal screeners, TSA remains ultimately responsible for security, with Federal Security Directors overseeing the contracted operations as well as the other airport security operations, such as air cargo and facility security compliance inspections that continue to be conducted only by Federal employees.

Currently, among our 450 airports with Federal screening, there are 16 airports participating in the SPP. These include the original five pilot airports—San Francisco International; Kansas City International; Greater Rochester International; Jackson Hole; and Tupelo Regional--and 11 others—Sioux Falls Regional; Key West International; Charles M. Schultz-Sonoma County;

Roswell Industrial Air Center; and seven small Montana airports: Frank Wiley Field; Sidney Richland Regional; Dawson Community; L.M. Clayton; Wokal Field; Havre City County; and Lewiston Municipal. In the most recent study conducted by TSA and examined by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) comparing the cost of screening at SPP airports and airports with a Federal screener workforce, we estimated that the cost to TSA of contracted screening is generally between 3 and 9 percent more than the cost of Federal screening. While GAO identified limitations in our initial cost estimates, their updated review in March 2011 noted that they believed “TSA has made progress in addressing three of seven limitations related to cost we identified in our January 2009 report and now has a more reasonable basis for comparing the cost of SPP and non-SPP airports.”

Shortly after I was confirmed as TSA Administrator, I directed a full review of TSA policies and programs with an eye toward helping the agency evolve into a more agile, high-performing organization that can detect and respond to evolving security threats. The SPP is just one program that I reviewed. At the time, I did not see any clear and substantial advantage to expanding the program, though I remained committed to maintaining contractor screening where it then existed. Now, as then, I am open to approving new applications where a clear and substantial benefit could be realized.

That being said, TSA remains a U.S. government counterterrorism agency. To fulfill our responsibility in this mission, it is important to maintain our flexibility—as new and emerging threats are identified, we must be able to adapt and modify our procedures quickly to protect the traveling public and promote the flow of legitimate commerce. As such, contracts with private service providers must include the flexibility to deliver screening comparable to that provided by Federal screening. Additionally, with a Federal workforce we have greater flexibility to more easily augment staff in the event of exigent circumstances such as natural disasters, or for surge capabilities, with National Deployment Office (NDO) screeners or screeners from nearby TSA-operated airports. Nevertheless, as noted above, I remain committed to maintaining a contractor workforce where such existed as of January of 2011, as appropriate.

As noted at the outset, we strive to maximize security not only by keeping ahead of current threats identified by intelligence, but by maintaining security systems that focus our resources on areas where they will yield the optimal benefit. This is consistent with our risk-based approach to security and critical in times of budget austerity. The SPP, no less than any other security program, must be implemented in a manner determined by cost as well as demonstrable benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.