

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Breach of Trust: Addressing Misconduct Among TSA Screeners***

August 1, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Breach of Trust: Addressing Misconduct Among TSA Screeners”:

“As Members of the authorizing Committee for the Transportation Security Administration, we must be vigilant in ensuring the security of our nation’s transportation systems. I am confident that the overwhelming majority of the civil servants who operate checkpoints and screen baggage at our nation’s airports take their role in securing our nation seriously, as well.

Therefore, I was surprised that we would have a hearing to discuss the publicized missteps by a few of the 46,000 screeners who staff the checkpoints of this nation’s airport. I think we can all acknowledge the failure of some of these screeners--the employees in Hawaii who engaged in racial profiling; the staff in Los Angeles who conspired with drug dealers, and the workers in Florida who failed to properly screen passengers. There is no doubt that each of these people violated the public trust and let down the flying public. In each case, the person was disciplined by TSA.

While the failure of a few may taint an agency in the court of public opinion, I think that we in Congress must have a standard that looks to the facts and the totality of the circumstances. As lawmakers, we must see the big picture and we must strive to ensure that the picture is complete.

A complete picture must include any instances of misconduct by those screeners who are employed by private companies. A complete picture must include the corrective actions taken by TSA when security breaches occur at airports with contracted screeners.

And that is why I sent a letter to Administrator Pistole last week requesting information on security breaches that have occurred at airports with contract screeners under the Screening Partnership Program. Mr. Chairman, I would also note for the record that I sent you a letter on Monday requesting that you provide this Subcommittee the opportunity to consider the legislation that I introduced to close the flight school security gap--a security gap that was identified during this Subcommittee’s last hearing.

Just as the American public should expect screeners at airports to do their jobs, they expect us to do ours. And our job, as the authorizing Committee for the Transportation Security Administration is to use the legislative and oversight processes to solve problems.

Absent producing a full authorization bill for TSA, the least we can do is enact common sense legislation that would prevent people on the no-fly list from learning how to fly. My bill, the “Flight School Security Act of 2012” would do just that.

Before yielding back Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out that we are hopeful that the very first collective bargaining agreement for TSOs will be finalized today. Finally, after a ten-year struggle, TSOs will have basic workplace rights that all employees deserve.”

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