

Statement of Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security
For Hearing “Challenging the Status Quo at TSA: Perspectives on the Future of
Transportation Security”

Terrorists remain determined to attack our transportation system. We must match their determination with our vigilance. Our perspective on transportation security changed after September 11th. We established the 9/11 Commission and passed legislation, which was based on the Commission’s recommendations.

We must all remember that in the wake of 9/11, our first step was the creation of TSA and the replacement of contract guards with Federal employees at this nation’s airport checkpoints.

The American public needed to know that each passenger would be screened and each bag would be checked. We owed it to the 3,000 people who died that day to assure that this would not happen again.

And Mr. Chairman, I welcome our efforts to continue to improve the system that secures our nation’s skies. Today, we will take a closer look at TSA’s risk based approach and the agency’s efforts to effectively address threats in transportation security.

The threat to inbound passenger and cargo flights remains a reality. These threats can only be resolved if Members of this body are not afraid to ask difficult questions or embrace complex answers.

Our witnesses today will discuss various ideas for improving TSA’s risk-based approach to securing our aviation sector. As the authorizing committee for TSA, it is certainly appropriate for us to hear and consider ideas from those who do not work for TSA.

In particular, I look forward to hearing from Ms. Alonso, a flight attendant, who will provide her front-line perspective on how TSA can enhance its layered security. As we know, flight attendants do not just serve beverages. They are often the first crewmembers to recognize and address safety and security problems.

A most recent example of this just took place a week ago, in China, crewmembers and passengers foiled a hijacking after 6 people attempted to break into the cockpit door. Further, just this year, we have had a number of instances in which the decisive actions of flight personnel ensured the safety and security of passengers.

In each of these instances, in-cabin security was the last line of defense in thwarting potential terrorist acts. To further reiterate the threats we face in aviation security, we must remember those incidents that frame our security discussions today.

On December 22, 2001, American Airlines Flight 63 was headed to Miami from Paris when a self-proclaimed Al-Qaeda operative attempted to detonate an explosive device, which was hidden in his shoe.

On December 25, 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, also remembered as the Christmas Day Bomber, attempted to detonate an underwear bomb aboard Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit Michigan.

And finally, on May 22nd of this year, American Airlines Flight 787 from Paris to Charlotte North Carolina, was diverted to Bangor after a passenger claimed to have an explosive device inside their body. All these incidents took place on flights inbound to the United States from airports with privatized screening workforces.

Ms. Alonso, was on that flight in May. I look forward to hearing her testimony concerning this incident and her suggestions on how flight attendants can be included in TSA’s system of layered security. Her testimony will offer the kind of operational insight we need to examine what should be done when all other layers of security have been compromised.