

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Eleven Years After 9/11 Can TSA Evolve To Meet the Next Terrorist Threat?***

September 11, 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 “Eleven Years After 9/11 Can TSA Evolve To Meet the Next Terrorist Threat?”:

“Today marks the 11th anniversary of the September 11th tragedy. On that day, our nation was unprepared to prevent terrorists from learning how to fly airplanes. We did not prevent them from passing through security checkpoints with small weapons, and ultimately, we could not stop them from hijacking a plane.

On that day we learned that a lack of preparedness can come with a great cost. One of the most important reforms we made was to establish the Transportation Security Administration and assign it responsibility for securing our nation’s transportation systems.

Since TSA was established, there has not been a single successful terrorist attack against our aviation system. I extend my gratitude to the hard working men and women of TSA who wake up every day and commit to keeping the rest of us safe.

Make no mistake; working at a checkpoint screening passengers is hard work. Ensuring baggage and cargo does not pose a threat to passengers is a challenging and potentially dangerous occupation.

While TSA’s efforts have yielded admirable results, we know that the agency cannot afford to rest on its laurels. We still hear too many complaints from passengers about what happens in the airports and concerns from employees about the internal structure at TSA. Those complaints and concerns indicate that we must redouble our efforts to make TSA the agency the American people envisioned in the wake of September 11th.

As we have seen since 9/11, terrorists remain intent on attacking the aviation sector--from the shoe bomber in the months after 9/11 to the underwear bomber on Christmas Day of 2009. But we must not confuse the evolution in the nature of the terrorist plot with a change in terrorist intent. We must meet their commitment with our unwavering resolve. Our resolve must include the determination to ensure security that is both effective and constitutionally sound.

Recently, the New York Times published an article exposing whistleblower claims that Behavior Detection Officers in Boston were being directed by their supervisors to target minorities who had committed no crime and represented no threat.

This is not the first time such claims have been leveled against the so-called SPOT program. In just the last year, similar claims were made at airports in Newark and Hawaii. A single incident may be dismissed as an anomaly. Three incidents in a single year point to systemic flaws.

That is why I have urged the Administrator to suspend the program until TSA complies with GAO’s recommendation that the science behind the program be validated by an independent third party. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today. I am particularly eager to hear from Deputy Administrator Halinski on how TSA intends to address the systemic flaws in the SPOT program.

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