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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

#### Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

#### Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

### Joint Hearing of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure entitled, "TSA Oversight Part III: Effective Security or Security Theater?"

March 26, 2012

Today, the Oversight Committee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convene to examine measures TSA utilizes to secure our nation's transportation networks.

In the realm of aviation security, TSA must achieve a delicate balance. TSA must be effective in meeting the evolving threats posed by terrorists. We also expect it to be responsive to the needs of the public and the demands of commerce.

Since the terrible events of September 11, 2001, several attacks have been attempted against commercial planes, including the attempted bombing on Christmas Day 2009 of Northwest Airlines Flight 253, and the attempted bombing in 2010 of a cargo jet using a bomb disguised as an ink jet cartridge. These incidents demonstrate the constantly evolving threats TSA must counter.

TSA's 43,000 Transportation Security Officers must screen more than two million passengers every day at our nation's 450 airports. Although the vast majority of passengers pose no risk, these Officers must find the equivalent of the needle in the haystack.

In response to the Christmas Day bombing attempt, TSA increased its deployment of Advanced Imaging Technology systems to screen passengers for both metallic and non-metallic threats. More recently, TSA has developed the PreCheck program to expedite screening for low-risk travelers, such as members of the military. I welcome TSA's efforts to develop a more intelligent, risk-based approach to transportation security.

Recognizing the enormity of the challenge TSA faces, as the agency develops new screening techniques, we must ensure that it strikes the appropriate balance between moving too quickly to deploy untested or unreliable technologies or techniques and moving too slowly to address new threats.

Today's hearing will also review the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC). When I served as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, I convened hearings in 2007 and 2008 to review the roll-out of TWIC, and I thank the Coast Guard for joining us today.

Unlike many screening techniques TSA uses in the aviation realm, Congress mandated what became the TWIC program and required that this program be funded by fees collected from enrollees.

There are now more than 2.1 million enrollees and, by our estimate, these enrollees have paid approximately \$280 million to implement this program. To close the security perimeter that TWIC is intended to create, we must finally implement the use of readers so these cards are no longer just expensive "flash passes." TSA must also ensure that TWICs are not issued to ineligible applicants.

However, we must also view TWIC in the broader maritime security context. TWIC is meant to control landside access to secure areas of U.S. ports and to secure areas of U.S. vessels. There are many risks that approach our ports particularly from the waterside that TWIC was never intended to address.

None of the individuals on the estimated 17 million small boats operating in our waters are required to carry TWICs, and none of the foreign mariners on the more than 9,000 foreign-flagged vessels calling on U.S. ports carry TWICs.

Our first and most critical line of maritime defense – our thin blue line at sea – is the U.S. Coast Guard, which must defend our coasts, rescue thousands at sea, respond to marine casualties and oil spills, intercept drugs and migrants, and enforce security requirements at 2,500 facilities and on nearly 13,000 vessels regulated by the Maritime Transportation Security Act.

This service of 42,300 active duty officers and members do all of this on a budget of less than \$10 billion per year – less than two percent of the DOD's base budget – and they now face additional cuts and the loss of up to 1,000 active duty slots in next year's budget.

The Coast Guard does all that we ask of it and more. However, we cannot continue to stretch this service and assume that it will never break or that gaps will not open in our maritime security.

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