

***Statement of Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)***  
***In support of H.R. 1204, the “Aviation Security Stakeholder***  
***Participation Act of 2013”***

***December 3, 2013***

I rise in strong support of H.R. 1204, the “Aviation Security Stakeholder Participation Act of 2013.” Last Congress, I introduced a version of the legislation before us today when the charter for the Aviation Security Advisory Committee was allowed to expire, resulting in the Advisory Committee becoming inactive.

Since shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the Advisory Committee has provided formal stakeholder input and advice to TSA with respect to aviation security policies. I was pleased that, in response to my bill, then-Secretary Napolitano restored this critical forum for stakeholder input. To prevent a lapse in the Advisory Committee’s operations, it is important that it be codified in law.

That is exactly what H.R. 1204 does. The bill authorizes, in law, the establishment of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee to provide representatives from air carriers, aircraft manufacturers, airport operators, general aviation stakeholders and labor organizations, among others an opportunity to provide input into policymaking and have their voices heard.

It also requires the establishment of subcommittees to focus on cargo security, general aviation security, perimeter security, exit lane security, security-related technologies and risk-based security, respectively.

Whatever your thoughts about TSA’s policy decisions, I believe we can all agree that such decisions should be made only after meaningful consultation and coordination with stakeholders. Earlier this year, when TSA announced proposed changes to its “Prohibited Items List” that would have resulted in knives being allowed on planes for the first time since 9/11, we got a firsthand glimpse of the problems that arise when stakeholders are not consulted.

Only after an overwhelmingly negative reaction to this decision did Administrator Pistole put the issue before the Advisory Committee for review. Ultimately, after this critical consultation, TSA reversed its decision.

Also earlier this year, and again without consulting stakeholders, TSA announced that it would discontinue its practice of overseeing security at exit lanes at many U.S. airports. TSA arrived at this decision without first consulting the airport operators who, of course, would be required to absorb the cost for hiring contract guards to staff exit lanes. Last week, we learned that TSA was informed by the impacted airport operators that they will be filing a lawsuit to block TSA’s plan to stop providing exit lane security.

The American Association of Airport Executives and Airports Council International have requested that TSA refrain from implementing the announced policy change until the court has heard their case. I would like to associate myself with that request and urge Administrator Pistole to put the proposed policy change regarding exit lanes before the Aviation Security Advisory Committee for review.

One has to wonder whether litigation could have been avoided in the first place had TSA simply consulted with the Advisory Committee prior to announcing that it would no longer staff exit lanes.

I would like to thank Chairman McCaul, Subcommittee Chairman Hudson, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Richmond for cosponsoring the bill before us today.

I would also ask that letters of support for H.R. 1204 from the following organizations be placed into the record under general leave: The Cargo Airline Association, The Association of Flight Attendants, The U.S. Travel Association, Airports Council International, The Security Manufacturers Coalition, General Aviation Manufacturers Association, and The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

With that I urge my colleagues to once again support legislation to codify the Aviation Security Advisory Committee.