

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
*“Oversight of the Transportation Security Administration: First-Hand and
Government Watchdog Accounts of Agency Challenges”*
June 9, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I thank the Chairman for holding this important and timely hearing.

Few federal agencies interact with the American people more on a daily basis than the Transportation Security Administration. The men and women who work for TSA have a very difficult, but extremely important job.

Last month, I spoke on the Senate floor about two women who have dedicated their careers to keeping our aviation system secure by working for TSA. In fact, one of these women was shot in the line of duty and showed up to work, the very next day. Every day, these women and their colleagues around the country work in a very challenging environment to keep our aviation system – and those of us who use it – safe and secure. We don’t do enough to acknowledge that and to thank them when they do their jobs well.

While I believe it is important for us to recognize exemplary performance when it is done at TSA or throughout other parts of the Department of Homeland Security more often than we do, this committee also has an obligation to exercise our oversight responsibilities when performance falls well short of that standard.

Thanks to our witnesses before us today, we have been alerted to a number of instances where performance by TSA and its employees appears to have been disappointing and, even, troubling. Just yesterday, for example, we learned from the DHS Inspector General that seventy-three individuals with possible links to terrorism have been granted credentials to access secure areas of airports across our country.

And last week, of course, we learned about significant vulnerabilities at passenger screening checkpoints uncovered by the Inspector General. The reported failure rates for detecting prohibited items at checkpoints are more than troubling. They are unacceptable. I look forward to reviewing the DHS Inspector General’s full report and recommendations later this summer. That said, I am encouraged by the swift action taken by the Secretary of Homeland Security to address the Inspector General’s findings.

Since 2011, the Transportation Security Administration has transitioned from a ‘one-size-fits-all’ screening philosophy to one that is more risk-based. This approach is designed to allow TSA to deploy its limited resources to the areas where we face the greatest threat.

However, as the Inspector General and GAO have identified, such a swift transition may have created vulnerabilities in the system. Given recent reports, it is more important than ever for the Transportation Security Administration to have a permanent, Senate-confirmed leader in place. I thank the Chairman and his staff for working so quickly and cooperatively with my staff to move Vice Admiral Neffenger’s nomination, which we’ll examine in a hearing tomorrow.

With that, I look forward to the testimony and thank the witnesses for appearing here today. I am especially grateful that current front line employees have joined us today to discuss their perspective on how to improve TSA.

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