



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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Opening Statement of Senator Susan M. Collins

Ten Years After 9/11: Next Wave in Aviation Security

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As Prepared for Delivery

By targeting our airplanes, al Qaeda succeeded in killing nearly 3,000 people. Aviation security is clearly critical to homeland security.

We Americans have demonstrated our willingness to endure enhanced security measures at our airports -- if those measures appear reasonable and related to the real risks. But travelers become frustrated when security measures inconvenience them without cause, or when they appear to be focused on those who pose no threat.

Next month, it will be 10 years since the shoe bomber failed to take down his flight from Paris bound for Miami. Yet, we still take off our shoes.

In 2006, British and American intelligence thwarted an attempt to conceal explosives in liquid bottles. We still can't carry a regular-size tube of toothpaste onto an airplane.

The Christmas Day bomber hid explosives in his underwear, and media reports indicate that terrorists have shown interest in having explosive devices surgically implanted in their bodies. These threats have led to more intrusive pat-down searches, and one wonders what more will be required of airline passengers in the future.

We see TSA putting the very young and the elderly through intrusive, and in most cases unnecessary, screenings.

At the same time, it troubles many Americans to learn that a young man was able to fly cross-country without a valid government ID and with an expired boarding pass that was not even in his name.

If we continue to give extra screening to individuals who pose no threat, yet others who should arouse suspicion can get past check points without being questioned, our systems are still not working as they should.

Since our June hearing, the Administration has implemented a risk analysis to improve the screening process, a welcome change. This effort should provide a more effective and efficient use of the government's limited screening resources.

I am encouraged, for example, that this new risk-based approach is designed to permit TSA to learn more about travelers through information they choose to provide.

Some of the changes will also answer several of our common airport screening complaints. Secretary Napolitano said in September that frequent fliers who opt-in to a known-traveler program will often get to keep their shoes on and their lap tops in the bags. TSA has also changed the screening procedures for children under 12 -- a commonsense decision that was overdue.

Nevertheless, questions remain regarding how some security procedures affect Americans' privacy.

In August, TSA began installing new software in passenger screening machines designed to enhance traveler privacy. Using a generic outline of passengers, Automated Target Recognition detects items that could pose a potential threat.

I first saw this less invasive technology in Amsterdam in 2010 and repeatedly raised the issue with Administrator Pistole and Secretary Napolitano. I urged consideration of this software that better respects travelers' privacy and eliminates inconsistencies associated with human reviewers. I am pleased that this is finally the direction TSA is headed.

While ATR technology is currently being used with so-called "millimeter wave" machines, which use Radio Frequency energy to generate images, I would note that other Advanced Imaging Technology screening machines that use "backscatter" x-ray radiation have continued to raise health concerns. DHS should independently evaluate the health effects of that technology and establish a goal of using radiation-free screening technology.

Let me underscore my appreciation of the fact that no single screening technology can ensure our safety. A layered screening system is essential. We face a determined foe, and no machines can substitute for good intelligence, well-trained screeners, and an observant public.

The passenger screening process has received both attention and sometimes anger from the traveling public. It became clear last year, however, from the printer cartridge plot that cargo security is also a threat the terrorists are probing. This is why Senator Lieberman and I intend to introduce an Air Cargo Security bill later this year. Our successes in the risk-based screening of maritime cargo should provide a road map for risk-based screening of air cargo. And that is what our legislation is intended to do.

Our government's first priority is to protect against terrorism, and the public will accept a certain level of intrusion and inconvenience at our airports. But DHS should continue to expand the use of risk-based approaches to screening with technology and techniques that are safe and effective and that minimize privacy and health concerns.