

Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins

**“Nomination of Robert Harding to be Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security”**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
March 24, 2009

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**I join the Chairman in welcoming General Robert Harding as the nominee to be Assistant Secretary for the Transportation Security Administration.**

**The attempted bombing on Christmas Day reminds us that terrorists remain committed to attacking our nation. Whether on an airline or in other modes of transportation, TSA performs a critical role in protecting us from these attacks.**

**While progress has been made in improving our security, the fact that Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was able to board a flight with a bomb demonstrates flaws in our nation’s system of layered security. TSA must do more to ensure that U.S.-bound passengers who are potential threats receive more effective screening before they board planes.**

**Terrorists will continue to devise new strategies to penetrate our defenses. Armed with that knowledge, the TSA cannot be caught flat-footed by focusing only on the techniques terrorists employed in their last attack. Our defenses must be forward-looking and nimble, and TSA must foster a culture of continuous improvement to anticipate new challenges.**

**TSA plans to install more than 1,000 Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) machines in our nation’s airports by the end of Fiscal Year 2011. This effort, along with the use of more canine teams and the deployment of additional behavior detection officers, represent steps that will increase aviation security in the wake of the Christmas Day bombing attempt.**

**I am concerned, however, by a recent statement from GAO that “TSA does not yet have a written policy requiring operational testing prior to deployment.” TSA’s previous roll-outs of other screening technologies, such as the explosives trace portal (ETP) or “puffer” machines, took place prior to the completion of operational testing, resulting in stalled deployments and wasted taxpayer dollars. Given that experience, it is encouraging that TSA**

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has completed operational testing on the imaging machines currently being deployed to U.S. airports. I would like General Harding's assurance that, if confirmed, he would ensure successful operational testing is completed on all new screening technologies prior to installation.

Because foreign governments must be our partners in improving aviation security, TSA also must continue its international outreach, which has accelerated in recent months. This should include increased information sharing, the deployment of advanced technology, and enhanced screening of individuals who warrant more scrutiny.

But aviation isn't the only sector of transportation that merits TSA's vigilant efforts. The agency's mission extends to other modes of transportation as well, including our mass transit system. We cannot focus all our resources on terrorist threats to aviation alone, as the threat does not stop there.

General Harding has more than 30 years of experience in support of our nation's military and intelligence efforts. He finished his military career as the

second in command at the Defense Intelligence Agency. As a result, he knows first-hand the importance of using intelligence to guide operations – which will be a critical skill should he take the helm at TSA.

The nominee appears to have many strengths for this position. One area of concern, however, is the finding by the Defense Contract Audit Agency that General Harding's former company overbilled the government by more than \$860,000 on a contract in 2004. I will be asking a series of questions on this issue.

I also want to give General Harding the opportunity to clarify the role that interrogators from his former company played and whether or not there were any allegations of wrongdoing related to the work of these interrogators.

I look forward to discussing these and other matters with General Harding today.

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