

Prepared Statement of Senator Mary L. Landrieu
“Ten Years After 9/11: The Next Wave in Aviation Security”
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
November 2, 2011

In the aftermath of 9/11, Congress established a new federal agency to protect the flying public from future acts of terrorism. And while the Transportation Security Agency has succeeded in preventing another coordinated attack against the United States, its security achievements have taken a severe toll on efficiency and privacy - some might even say dignity.

Americans are accustomed to showing their boarding pass, ID, and walking through a metal detector at the airport, but in the course of the last few years, successive terrorist plots that we've uncovered have prompted additional requirements. Travelers must now remove their shoes, coats, laptops, liquids, and completely empty their pockets before undergoing explosive scans, hand swabs, secondary bag inspections, and the notorious pat-downs.

Balancing security with privacy is not a new challenge in the realm of homeland security, but the TSA is unique because the average American citizen interacts with Transportation Security Officers more than any other segment of the federal workforce, which means that TSA employees and procedures have a profound impact on people's impression of the federal government as a whole. So when infants and elderly women are patted down and wheelchairs are taken apart, people feel that their government is behaving in an intrusive and insensitive fashion, and what's more, they are not even realizing a security benefit for all that trouble given the low-level threat posed by these populations.

A 2010 survey by Consensus Research concluded that American travelers would take 2 to 3 additional flights each year if the hassles of security screening were eliminated. That would translate into an additional \$85 billion in consumer spending and 900,000 jobs in the United States. The same study found that a majority of respondents consider the current system to be “inconsistent,” “stressful,” and “embarrassing.”

Richard Reid, the Underwear Bomber, and the Heathrow and UPS cargo plots are all evidence that Al Qaeda and its affiliates still seek to blow up commercial and cargo jets, so we cannot afford to let our guard down. But that doesn't mean we can't develop a smarter system that provides both security *and* convenience. Technology and training are critical to achieving that dual objective. New equipment will protect privacy, expedite screening, and reduce manpower requirements. Better training will identify threats more effectively and improve the public's perception and trust in the agency overall.

The challenge inherited by TSA Administrator Pistole is immense. I met with him privately on March 11th and questioned him in front of this committee at a hearing on June 22nd about the agency's plans to bridge the huge divide between the current, one-size-fits-all system that treats each passenger as an equal threat, and a risk-based system for the future that is more cost-effective, user-friendly, and focused on credible threats. Mr. Pistole has demonstrated his willingness to simplify procedures and advance reforms by launching 6 important new initiatives that I would like to outline very briefly:

- 1) Deploying new ***Advanced Imaging Technology*** machines to more accurately detect explosives or anomalies without displaying revealing body images;
- 2) Using ***Automatic Target Recognition*** software to automate detection instead of requiring TSA personnel to view images on a screen;

- 3) A program called ***SPOT*** that uses Behavior Detection Officers instead of random selections to determine whether passengers must undergo secondary screening;
- 4) A pilot called ***Pre-Check*** that allows frequent flyers to keep their shoes and jackets on and their laptops and liquids in their bag if they complete a background check and register biometric data;
- 5) A pilot called ***Known Crewmember*** that allows airline pilots to forego screening if they're in the FAA database and show 2 forms of ID; and
- 6) A pilot called ***Credential Authentication Technology/Boarding Pass Screening Systems*** that will use electronic scanners to check IDs and boarding passes instead of requiring TSA officers to carry out this task.

So the TSA is making important strides, but it still has a long way to go, and the American people, the domestic travel and tourism industry, and I expect them to get it done. The 3 pilot programs that I just mentioned will only operate for a few months in a handful of airports, so the agency must review, tweak, and expand them as quickly as possible once their trial periods conclude.

This hearing is about finding ways to improve the experience of the flying public without unreasonable sacrifices in security. Financing these improvements is not the domain of the federal government alone; airport authorities, individuals, and airlines also play a role.

- ***Airports*** may need to re-design their facilities to accommodate the “Checkpoint of the Future.”
- ***Passengers*** may be required to pay an increased security fee to offset the additional costs to acquire new technologies.
- ***Airlines***, whose security fees have not increased since 2001, may also be asked to help finance these improvements.

Airlines have suffered decreased passenger volume since 9/11 as a result of heightened security concerns, fuel prices, and the recession. But airlines have also contributed to the public's general frustration with the entire flying experience by charging a widening array of fees for very basic amenities. So now, in addition to undressing and being groped at security checkpoints, passengers are being forced to pay for checked baggage, carry-on baggage, and sufficient legroom.

Streamlining aviation screening will ultimately make us safer, save taxpayers money, uphold passengers' dignity, restore public confidence, increase throughput, and benefit the economy. As we move forward with TSA reforms, we must carefully consider how to allocate the costs of those improvements and evaluate security screening within the larger context of the public's overall experience. I look forward to working with Administrator Pistole, the industry organizations represented here today, and the members of this committee to accomplish these goals.