

**Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Nomination of Maj. General Robert A. Harding to be DHS Assistant Secretary
for the Transportation Security Administration**

Washington, DC

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning and welcome to this hearing on the nomination of Maj. General Robert A. Harding to be Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security in charge of the Transportation Security Administration.

Of all the changes in American life since September 11, 2001, TSA is one of the most visible and, over time, has become one of the most effective.

The TSA Administrator oversees an agency of 50,000 employees with an \$8 billion annual budget with a very important mission, which is to protect the safety of passengers and cargo travelling by air, rail, or road while also ensuring passengers and cargo movement is not unduly restricted.

We were reminded just how crucial the work of this agency is – and why getting a capable administrator on the job is critical – by the attempted Christmas Day bombing of Northwest Flight 253 as it was descending over Detroit.

General Harding, I really appreciated your 33 years of service in the U.S. Army. You are a nominee with vast experience in intelligence and security issues, as well as a proven ability to manage organizations that themselves need to work cooperatively with other organizations if they are to fulfill their missions.

To highlight just a few points of General Harding's long military career, he last served as Deputy to the Army's Chief of Intelligence, and prior to that he served as Director for Operations in the Defense Intelligence Agency.

As the Director for Operations at the DIA, General Harding managed the \$1 billion intelligence collection programs used by military commanders and the civilian leadership to guide their decisions. While at DIA, General Harding managed almost 5,000 employees, which included more than 200 attachés stationed abroad– a valuable experience he can bring to TSA as it now seeks to work more closely with the international aviation community to raise security standards around the globe.

General Harding also commanded a U.S.-based counterintelligence group that was responsible for infrastructure protection at each and every Army camp, post, and station in the United States. As part of his duties in that post, General Harding worked with the FBI and with local law enforcement on-base security experts.

General Harding has also been the recipient of numerous medals, awards and honors, including the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the National Reconnaissance Office Agency Seal Medallion, the Central Intelligence Agency Seal Medallion and was inducted into the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame in 2009.

After leaving the Army, General Harding worked in the private sector on intelligence issues, at one point forming his own company – Harding Security Associates – that did business with the federal government. Questions have been raised as part of the normal confirmation process about a particular contract to provide interrogators for the Defense Intelligence Agency. General Harding, I appreciate the time you spent with our staff last week answering questions about this and other matters. I am sure the Committee will explore these issues in more detail during the hearing and we will give you a chance to fully explain the contract, the issues that arose, and how they were resolved.

If you are confirmed you take charge of an agency that has made enormous strides in the last seven years to strengthen the security of the commercial aviation sector. But the Christmas Day attack reminds us that this is a tough assignment and our homeland defenses can still be breached. In light of that attack, I believe we should consider pre-screening all passengers against the TSDB, or watch list, and require enhanced physical screening of all passengers whose names are on this list, and I would welcome your thoughts on the matter.

I also believe TSA must be more aggressive in increasing the security of other forms of transportation, particularly mass transit and railways. We have already seen these modes of transportation attacked by terrorists in other countries – like the 2005 attacks on London’s buses and subways and the 2004 train bombings in Madrid – and I look forward to your thoughts on how better security of these transportation systems can be achieved.

Other issues I am interested in are ensuring a smooth roll out of Secure Flight, TSA’s program to assume responsibility for matching passenger names against watch lists; promoting greater effectiveness and fairness within the Transit Security Grant Program; and balancing privacy, safety and security concerns with the development of new technologies, like advanced imaging technology.

There are many management issues that will demand your attention, but a central question is whether Transportation Security Officers, or TSOs, should be granted collective bargaining rights. TSOs have sought this right since the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2003 – and I support their efforts – and I am drafting legislation to grant them that right, but I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this issue.

Again, welcome General Harding and I look forward to your testimony.

Senator Collins.