

Opening Statement for Chairman Joseph Lieberman
“Nomination of John S. Pistole”
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
June 17, 2010
As Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon. Today the Committee takes up the nomination of John Pistole to be Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security in charge of the Transportation Security Administration. Welcome Mr. Deputy Director.

Mr. Pistole has been nominated to administer an agency of almost 50,000 employees with a \$7 billion annual budget whose mission is to protect the safety of passengers and cargo travelling by road, rail, or air. This is an agency that, given its strategic importance to our homeland security, has gone far too long without permanent leadership.

Mr. Pistole, of course, is the Administration’s third nominee for the post. I hope number three will be the charm, so, this Committee plans to vote on Mr. Pistole’s nomination as soon as possible. I also hope the Senate confirms him quickly after that so TSA’s workforce can get the leadership it so richly deserves.

Mr. Pistole, you have 27 years of experience in law enforcement, intelligence, and counterterrorism as an FBI special agent, inspector, assistant director of operations, assistant director of counterterrorism, and, for the past five years, as FBI deputy director, second only to Director Mueller.

In rising through the FBI ranks, you have had important management responsibilities directing the day-to-day operations of an agency of 34,000 employees, 56 field offices, and a budget of \$8 billion. Your work with state and local law enforcement and with international law enforcement and intelligence officials adds further to your qualifications to head TSA.

You not only have dealt with the risks this country faces from terrorism but had a major hand in leading the government’s efforts to prevent terrorism within our homeland. During your tenure at the counterterrorism division, you oversaw the bureau’s domestic and international terror investigations and built the division from less than 200 employees to over 1,000. The FBI’s work with local law enforcement agencies over the past two years to investigate and arrest would-be homegrown terrorists – including Najibullah Zazi and Faisal Shahzad - has been particularly brilliant.

If you are confirmed as TSA Administrator, you will be taking charge of an agency that has made enormous strides in the last eight years to strengthen the security of the commercial aviation sector but that still faces important challenges, including improving the security of other forms of transportation, particularly mass transit and rail.

I was pleased by the Administration’s proposal for Fiscal Year 2011 to add \$900 million to key aviation security programs, including money for more whole body imaging machines and the personnel needed to operate them. The failed Christmas Day terrorist attack is the most recent evidence justifying this increase, as well as the increase in the number of Federal Air Marshalls, behavioral detection experts, and canine units.

We know from hard experience that attacking commercial aviation remains a key terrorist goal. That’s why the next TSA Administrator must ensure the smooth operation of Secure Flight, TSA’s program to match passenger names against watch lists, and the development and implementation of new screening technologies.

While the aviation sector remains a target for terrorists, other forms of transportation must also be better protected. TSA could do a better job to ensure the Transit Security Grant Program is fair and effective as it works with state and local authorities to secure mass transportation systems.

Mr. Pistole, you have been a superb public servant, and while others have left for the riches of the private sector, you continue to devote your career to keeping our country safe. Again, thank you for your service and your willingness to take on this new assignment.

Senator Collins.