

Statement of Vice Admiral Peter V. Neffenger
Nominee for Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Before the
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
United States Senate
June 10, 2015

Good Morning Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I am deeply privileged to appear before you today as the President's nominee to head the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I am honored by the President's call to serve our Nation in this important leadership position and by the support of Secretary Jeh Johnson, who has provided strong and inspired leadership to the Department of Homeland Security.

First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my fellow members of the United States Coast Guard, with whom I served for more than three decades of my professional life and from whom I have learned many lessons on leadership. They were and are always ready -- to protect the maritime economy and the environment, to defend our maritime borders, and to save those in peril. They have inspired my service and I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to have worked alongside them and to have led them as they safeguard our maritime interests in the heartland, at the ports, at sea, and around the globe. And to the men and women of TSA, I want them to know how deeply honored I am to potentially join their ranks and to serve them and the American people in securing our Nation's transportation systems. They perform an incredibly important and difficult mission, one that demands constant attention to detail and vigilance while sustaining a high level of professionalism and respect. I have confidence in them and would be honored to lead them.

As TSA pursues solutions to the challenges presented by recent and on-going covert testing, there are several critical concepts that must be in place to address the vulnerabilities highlighted. TSA must ensure the appropriate measures of effectiveness are in place to drive an institutional focus on the primary mission, in this case, securing aviation. There must be a culture of operational evolution, one that constantly questions assumptions, plans, and processes, and is able to rapidly field new concepts of operation, performance standards and capabilities, particularly given the persistent and adaptive enemy we face. Finally, delivering an effective system and earning the confidence of the traveling public will only come through competence, disciplined performance, and professionalism. If confirmed, I will bring this perspective and I will relentlessly pursue these objectives, to address the immediate challenges, and more broadly, to accomplish the important mission entrusted to TSA.

In addition, in my view, striking a balance between the demands of security and the imperatives of liberty will be critical. Overall, if confirmed, I will take on this challenge with a leadership perspective that has been at the core of my approach for some time, and one that has been proven in the crucible of the real world: a well-defined statement of the mission, clear and unequivocal standards of performance, training and resourcing that enable the workforce to achieve success, and a relentless pursuit of accountability.

If confirmed it would be my privilege to follow in the footsteps of my longtime mentor and one of TSA's first Administrators, Admiral James Loy, who was the Coast Guard Commandant from 1998 to 2002 and TSA Administrator from 2002 to 2003. I have been similarly privileged to serve our Nation as a senior commissioned officer in the United States Coast Guard. During my nearly 34 years of active service, I have been assigned a broad variety of operational, staff and leadership positions culminating in my current duties as Vice Commandant and second in command of the Coast Guard; the Nation's fifth armed service and premier maritime law enforcement agency. Each successive assignment has brought greater and more complex responsibilities in executing the Coast Guard's mission to secure America's waters and to protect the country against maritime threats. If confirmed, I will have the opportunity to apply this leadership experience and my law enforcement and security skills to one of the most challenging jobs in our Nation; protecting our transportation systems – especially aviation – from terrorists.

Since its creation after the attacks of 9/11/01, TSA has played an invaluable and pivotal role in securing our transportation systems from these threats. Still, more than thirteen years since, we face threats from terrorist groups around the world and from homegrown terrorists who are not affiliated with a particular network, but who, nonetheless are inspired by a message of hatred and violence. A persistent number of terrorist groups remain intent on striking the United States and the West, and we know that some of these groups are focused on commercial aviation. And, we must recognize that we have evolved to a new phase in the global terrorist threat. Today the terrorist threat is more decentralized, more diffuse, and more complex. And today's terrorists no longer build bombs in secret; they have now publicized their instruction manual and are calling for people to use it.

These persistent threats are TSA's most pressing challenge. Our enemies will continually adapt, and so must we. TSA must leverage intelligence, technology, the experience of our front-line operators and our private sector partners to ensure we employ effective, efficient and ever-evolving procedures to stop those who would harm us. We should pay particular attention to the insider threat. I'm encouraged by the thoughtful recommendations provided by the Aviation Security Advisory Committee and, if confirmed, will commit to closely reviewing and pursuing the long-term enhancements recommended.

Retention, training and accountability are a second significant challenge facing TSA. Front-line managers and screeners are critical to the success of TSA, particularly in light of the screening operation vulnerabilities reported recently. As I stated above, a well-defined mission statement, clear performance standards, training and equipping that enable the workforce to achieve success, and a relentless pursuit of accountability are critical to address the recent operational challenges. Agency culture, morale and effectiveness are a direct result of consistent and career-long training, recognition and accountability. If confirmed, while we should further right-size our workforce consistent with the implementation of risk-based security principles, I will pay close attention to training and workforce development, to include how to leverage the TSA Academy to improve individual performance and to instill a greater sense of pride in the agency and its mission.

A related challenge to address is customer service, which is a critical success factor. TSA interacts with millions of travelers each day – travelers who expect efficient and effective screening with minimal delay, and who deserve to be treated with respect. Through my current career, I have routinely interacted with the public and have learned that an organization must continually reinforce this message of dignity and respect to embed it into an agency culture.

A third organizational challenge for TSA is ensuring it is continually fielding the tools and equipment the workforce needs to address this persistent and adaptive threat today, while envisioning longer term the investments necessary to recapitalize and modernize security of our Nation's transportation system.

As such, if confirmed, I will commit myself to ensuring that TSA remains a high-performing, highly-capable counterterrorism organization that is guided by a risk-based strategy to prevent attacks and safeguard legitimate travel and commerce; that TSA employs a multi-layered, intelligence-driven operation and one that discards a one-size fits-all approach; that TSA recruits and retains a highly-trained workforce, one that has the opportunity for career growth and development while placing a premium on professional values and individual accountability to high standards of performance and customer service; that TSA pursues advanced capabilities with innovation and adaptation central to its acquisition strategy to counter evolving threats; and that TSA will continue to invest in and strengthen its integration in the intelligence community, in the private sector, with its stakeholders, and among DHS, federal, state, and local partners. To protect aviation, mass transit, rail, highways, ports, and pipeline systems, I will follow this strategy, engage and lead the workforce, adapt and invest appropriately, and remain focused on these critical success factors.

I have a proven record of leading people and carrying out complex missions and priorities. As Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard, I serve as the Vice Service Chief, Chief Operating Officer and Component Acquisition Executive responsible to train, equip and organize over 50,000 men and women who keep our Nation's waters safe, secure and protected. I approve and certify acquisition programs of record for the Service, and oversee compliance with the Chief Financial Officer and Federal Financial Reform Act of 1990, with the Coast Guard achieving a clean audit

opinion for two consecutive years. I currently serve as the senior authority for all resource requests and budget submissions for the Service.

I have an extensive background in applying the strategic principles of security to port operations and maritime threats, principles that translate effectively to other transportation modes. I served as Commander of the Ninth Coast Guard District overseeing all Coast Guard operations on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway and along the Northern Border with Canada. I also commanded Sector Los Angeles-Long Beach and served as the Federal Maritime Security Coordinator and Captain of the Port for the Nation's largest port complex in addition to leading Coast Guard operations throughout approximately 300 miles of California coast and coastal waters. In both commands, I worked closely with interagency and international partners, industry and the private sector, citizens groups and non-governmental organizations, and federal, state and local law enforcement to develop risk-based methods for screening vessels, cargo and people operating in our ports and waterways. I focused on determining highest risk commerce while facilitating legitimate activities. I also established one of the nation's first interagency Area Maritime Security Committees which brought together leaders from industry, labor, government, first responder agencies and the local community to tackle the critical challenge of securing the vital Los Angeles and Long Beach ports and maritime approaches to the West Coast of the United States.

In addition, I have a proven record of leading through crises. I served as Deputy National Incident Commander for the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010 following the tragic explosion, the loss of eleven lives, and the sinking of the Deepwater Horizon Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit which precipitated the largest and longest oil spill in U.S. history. At the national level, I helped to ensure a coordinated, unified, whole-of-government effort to respond to the massive spill. I led over 50,000 people from federal, state and local agencies; tribal representatives; non-governmental organizations; and the private sector throughout five Gulf Coast states. I regularly briefed the President, Members of Congress, Cabinet Secretaries, state Governors and regional elected officials on progress and milestones, including appearing before Congressional Committees on multiple occasions.

Finally, throughout my years of service I have remained aware of the need to balance desires for greater security with the protection of the liberties and rights we cherish as Americans. If confirmed, safeguarding the civil liberties and privacy interests of all Americans will remain a top priority. I look forward to partnering with this Committee on a range of initiatives to enhance the safety of the traveling public and to achieve this balance.

I applaud the work the men and women of TSA perform each and every day. It would be my great honor to join them and have the privilege of leading this team of committed patriots.

In closing, I again thank President Obama and Secretary Johnson for their confidence and faith in my ability to lead TSA. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Carper, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.