

**Statement of Ranking Member Fred Thompson**  
**Hearing, "Has Airline Security Improved"**  
**Wednesday, November 14, 2001**

Unfortunately, some people are too hung up right now on whether the system charged with ensuring airline security should be a federal or non-federal one. The point I'd like to make today is that it doesn't make a difference unless the people on the ground are held accountable and the public is sure that those responsible are doing their job

And unfortunately, having performance subject to accountability is not yet institutionalized within the industry. It must be. Where are the incentives for the top safety executives to ensure that their workforce is up to this enormous challenge? What drives the head of security at each airport to guarantee that his or her employees are trained, rested, and alert? And how motivated is each individual screener to perform his job, knowing that good performance will be rewarded and poor performance might mean the end of that job? Across all levels of this enterprise, accountability has largely been missing, except when the TV cameras are watching.

Instead of merely reacting to each unfortunate discovery of dangerous items that make it through the screening process onto an airplane, we must be proactive, making sure that the right tools are in place from the start. Until each employee has a clear understanding of what his job is and has a reason to do it the right way, we'll keep playing catch up.

Therefore, we must begin with a comprehensive performance plan, which gives the entire airline security sector a clear strategic direction. We then must establish performance goals --for all levels of management, not just the screeners-- that flow from the plan and leave no doubt about what is expected throughout the organization. Finally, we ought to include bonuses for superior performance as well as provisions that allow employees who fail to meet these goals to be suspended or terminated.

There has been lots of discussion of the upsides and downsides of federalization of the system. One of the main objections to federalization is that it is so difficult to hold employees accountable. According to a recent review of such appeal processes by the Inspector General of the Railroad Retirement Board, "Under the current system, Federal government management is often reluctant to take necessary disciplinary action to contest dubious claims filed by employees. The result is a bureaucracy that accommodates employees who cannot or will not perform their jobs because, at times, management is unable to meaningfully and efficiently deal with the problem and the ensuing burden of litigation."

It is important to note that with the current system, an employee may be removed from his or her specific job, suspended with pay, while the appeals process is ongoing. However, this does very little to instill accountability in the process by which supervisors in the federal government manage their employees.

That is why the amendment I drafted and was accepted as part of the Senate Aviation Security Act holds not just screeners accountable, but every employee, setting clear performance goals. The Department of Transportation must prepare a performance plan setting out the goals and objectives necessary to ensure aviation security. But most important, under my amendment, every employee hired under the act must enter into a performance agreement, in which they commit to being evaluated based on their performance in achieving goals related to aviation security. This gives aviation security employees greater clarity of mission.

The point I'd like to stress is whether the system is a federal one or contracted, this plan can be placed within either system to bring about accountability, motivation, and punishment for these jobs. I urge that we keep that in mind as we consider this matter, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today.