U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, & TRANSPORTATION
SENATOR ROGER WICKER, CHAIRMAN * SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL, RANKING MEMBER

HEARINGS

September 5, 2018

Keeping Our Skies Secure: Oversight of the Transportation Security Administration

106 Dirksen

U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, will convene a hearing entitled, "Keeping Our Skies Secure: Oversight of the Transportation Security Administration," at approximately 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday, September 5, 2018. The exact start time is contingent on the conclusion of an earlier and separate Commerce Committee business meeting that will be open to the public in the same hearing room. As part of the Committee's oversight responsibilities, this hearing will examine the progress made by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in its efforts to advance aviation security and the challenges that remain.

"As the front line of our nation's transportation security, TSA has to learn from mistakes and shortcomings to keep us safe," said **Thune.** *"This hearing will offer Senators the opportunity to ask the administrator questions about the deployment of new screening technologies, improved security measures, and other-issues affecting our security and rights."*

Witness:

- The Honorable David P. Pekoske, Administrator, Transportation Security Administration

Hearing Details:

Wednesday, September 5, 2018
10:15 a.m.
Full Committee
Dirksen 106

This hearing will take place in Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 106. Witness testimony, opening statements, and a live video of the hearing will be available on **www.commerce.senate.gov**.

Majority Opening Statement

Good Morning and welcome back Admiral Pekoske (Peh-koss-kee). I want to begin by thanking you and the men and women of the TSA for the vital job you do. That's probably something we don't say often enough. At the same time, I want to encourage you to continue improving, and that's the spirit that underpins our oversight today.

Over two years ago, the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016, or FESSA (FESS-uh),

was enacted into law. It included multiple provisions from my Airport Security Enhancement and Oversight Act designed to reform and refocus TSA's efforts. Two years after enactment, however, some important mandates contained in FESSA remain outstanding, including updated regulations to enhance airport and airline employee access controls. I look forward to hearing an update on implementation of these measures.

As threats to aviation continually evolve, we must ensure that TSA is able to test, procure, and deploy new technologies to counter those threats. Recent advancements in computed tomography, biometrics, and credential authentication technologies empower TSA to enhance its layers of security and better respond to potential vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, TSA has had difficulty testing and deploying these technologies to airports in a timely manner, as well as adequately communicating and adhering to its long-term technology investment plan, which makes it challenging for security technology manufacturers to do their part in supporting the agency's needs. TSA must provide certainty in its equipment procurement plans to enable the consistent, rapid deployment of advanced screening technologies.

This past Labor Day weekend, an estimated 16.5 million passengers were predicted to travel through our nation's airports, which is a new record for that particular holiday travel period. With so many passengers requiring screening at airport checkpoints, we are reminded of the importance of the PreCheck Program to pre-vet and expedite screening for low-risk travelers so that public airport areas are less vulnerable and TSA can focus on screening passengers who are higher risk.

Unfortunately, TSA has not significantly increased its PreCheck enrollment numbers in recent years, and has not yet offered expanded services and options for travelers to make enrollment easier as required under FESSA.

On the whole, however, TSA continues to lead the world in creating a secure global aviation environment. In the last year, TSA has issued security directives for airports with commercial flights to the United States aimed at countering threats related to personal electronic devices, powders, and air cargo.

Since these security directives were announced, many countries have successfully implemented enhanced screening protocols, and some countries including the United Kingdom, have followed the TSA's lead with similar directives, raising the global standard for aviation security and ensuring safer international travel.
We want to ensure that TSA remains a global security leader and sets the standards for the rest of the world. The TSA Modernization Act, which I authored along with Senators Nelson, Blunt, and Cantwell, would help the agency do so by addressing the issues I have mentioned here today. I am hopeful that we can enact this reauthorization bill in the coming weeks as part of our FAA Reauthorization effort.

Before concluding my remarks I want to note the words of a man who led this Committee for many years. In April 2000, 18 months before the attacks of 9/11, he said the following in prepared remarks for an aviation security hearing:

"I am certainly aware that aviation security is a complex and difficult undertaking, and any

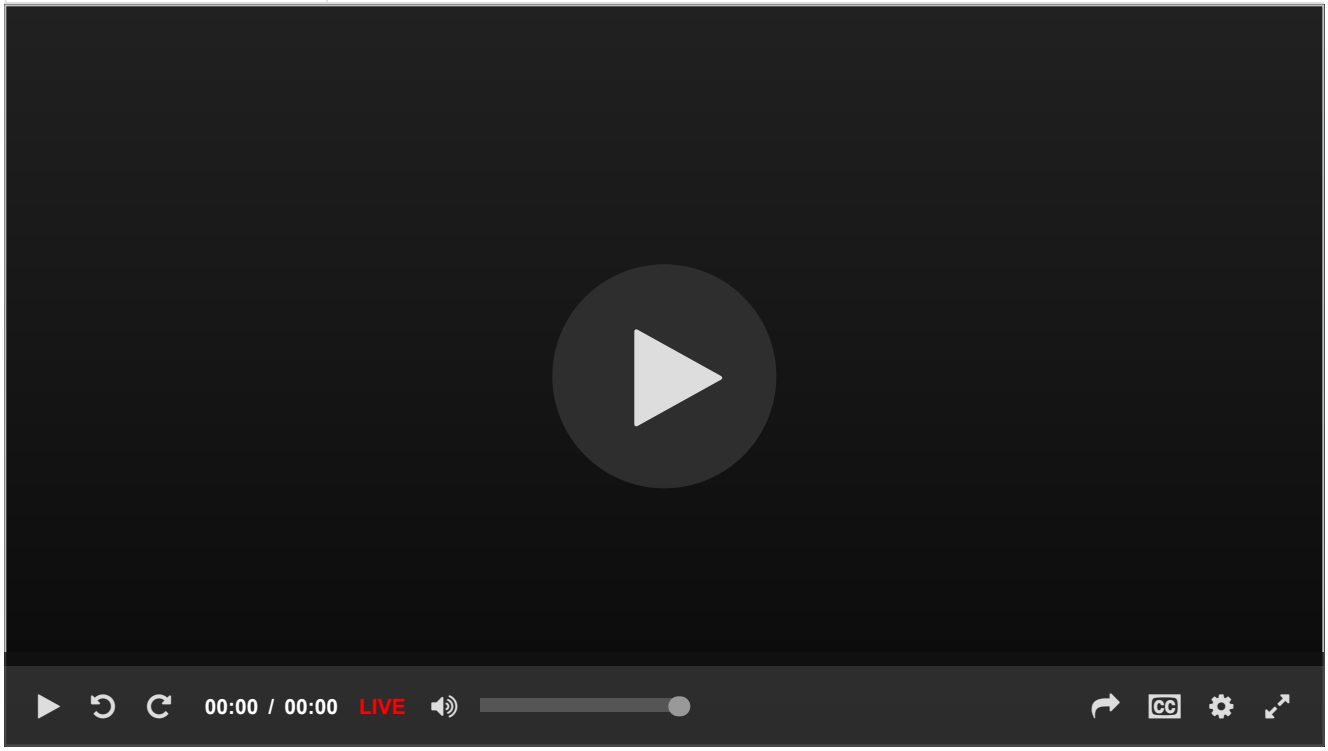
system involving humans is going to have flaws. … Every effort must be made to increase awareness and performance. You can be sure that Osama bin Laden and others like him will continue to target Americans and American interests."

These words by then-Chairman John McCain not only demonstrated remarkable foresight, but still hold true in many ways even though the names of those who want to do us harm have changed. It is also a reminder of the legacy and impact of our friend and colleague, who as Chairmen helped craft legislation establishing the TSA and stabilizing the airline industry in the wake of the horrific events of 9/11.

As we near the 17th anniversary of those attacks, we are soberly reminded once again of how important the TSA's work is, and of all your agency does to keep the travelling public secure.

With that, I reiterate my thanks to the Administrator for being here and turn to Ranking Member Nelson for his opening statement.

Archived Webcast



Minority Statement

Bill Nelson

Witness Panel 1

The Honorable David P. Pekoske

Administrator

Transportation Security Administration

Administrator Pekoske Witness Testimony.pdf (98.6 KBs)

Permalink: **https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2018/9/keeping-our-skies-secure-oversight-of-the-transportation-security-administration**