

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Airport Security: The Necessary Improvements to Secure America's Airports”**

April 19, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee hearing entitled “Airport Security: The Necessary Improvements to Secure America's Airports:”

“I would like to thank everyone for coming out today to discuss this very important airport security issue. That is the screening of airport employees.

There are many people who work in our nation’s airports, both for TSA as well as private companies, who have access to highly secured areas. We need to be sure those persons who have access to plans or other sensitive areas are trustworthy individuals who are not a threat to the traveling public.

There are many recent examples of employees using their access to these areas to commit crimes. It would be just as easy for them to use this access to commit acts of terrorism.

At O’Hare in Chicago, and undercover sting revealed that airport workers were being paid to help undercover agents bypass security to smuggle nearly \$400,000 overseas. At Orlando International Airport, an undercover reporter found TSA workers accessing ‘sterile’ areas, with bags, that weren’t screened. Just last month it was revealed that workers at Orlando International exploited a gap in security that allowed them to get a bag full of guns and drugs on a plane bound for Puerto Rico.

This is unacceptable. TSA seems heavily reliant on random screening of employees to prevent such incidents from happening. But clearly this is not enough. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001 requires that TSA implement full worker screenings.

I am aware that TSA has announced what it calls it’s “Industry-Cooperative Employee Screening Program,” which is supposed to address these gaps in security. However we are concerned that we may need to do more legislatively to be certain that these issues are addressed.

Next week, this subcommittee intends to mark-up a bill by Rep. Lowey and Rep. Brown-Waite that would create a pilot program at certain airports to screen employees with access to secure or ‘sterile’ areas.

It is my hope that we learn things today that will guide us as we move forward to the markup. Once again I’d like to thank everyone for their participation and I look forward to hearing the testimony.”

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