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Before the
Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
Committee on Homeland Security
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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Jackson Lee, Ranking Member Dent, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to appear before you and this Subcommittee for the first time since my confirmation as the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Madame Chairwoman, I appreciate the time I spent with you in Houston and I look forward to deepening the partnership between TSA and this Committee as we work together to improve transportation security.

Today I want to share some thoughts with you about improving TSA's counterterrorism focus through intelligence and cutting-edge technology, and supporting TSA's 60,000-member workforce. These goals support my efforts to lead TSA through the next stage of its development as it matures into a truly high-performance, world-class organization that facilitates travel by using smart, intelligence-driven security solutions that do not compromise the safety, privacy or civil liberties of the American people.

Intelligence-Based Counterterrorism

Earlier this month, we commemorated the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the devastation they wrought in New York City, at the Pentagon, and due to the brave intervention of passengers, a field in Pennsylvania. The memory of that day is seared into our psyches, and is a constant, somber reminder that we must be ever vigilant against those who would attack our freedoms, our economy, and our way of life, and who would disrupt our nation's transportation system.

A key lesson I took from that day and from my 27 years at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is that one of the best tools we possess in our effort to combat terrorism is accurate and

timely intelligence. It is with this in mind that I begin my day at TSA with an intelligence briefing with my senior staff – we are constantly honing our counterterrorism focus by working with DHS and our federal partners to better operationalize this intelligence.

For example, through better watchlisting capabilities and the implementation of our Secure Flight program, we continue to improve our efforts to prevent terrorists from boarding flights. Under Secure Flight, TSA uses name, date of birth, and gender to vet airline passengers against terrorist watch lists before those passengers are permitted to board planes. Passengers who are potential watch list matches are immediately identified for appropriate notifications and coordination. Secure Flight vets 100 percent of passengers flying on U.S. airlines domestically and internationally, as well as passengers on many foreign airlines, and we are working hard toward the goal of fully implementing the program for remaining covered foreign air carriers by the end of 2010. Counting both U.S. and foreign carriers, Secure Flight currently vets over 97 percent of all airline passenger travel to, from, and within the U.S.

Even the best intelligence, however, does not always identify in advance every individual who would seek to do us harm. So we also rely on the security expertise of our frontline personnel – Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), Federal Air Marshals, explosive specialists, and Behavior Detection Officers, among others – to help prevent terrorists from harming Americans.

That reliance means that valuable intelligence must be distributed widely and rapidly to our employees in the field. One way we are improving this process is through the extension of secret-level security clearances to a greater number of TSA employees. This change significantly enhances TSA's ability to leverage the best intelligence and elevate our security practices across the board.

But our nation's security also is a shared responsibility. So we are encouraging our citizens, our communities, and our security and law enforcement partners across the country to remain vigilant and continue to build a national culture of preparedness and resiliency. As you know, Secretary Napolitano recently announced the expansion of the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign. This simple and effective program was started by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to raise public awareness of indicators of terrorism, crime, and other threats and to emphasize the importance of reporting suspicious activity to the proper transportation and law enforcement authorities. In transportation sectors, I have joined Secretary Napolitano to launch "If You See Something, Say Something" with Amtrak and the general aviation community this year.

In addition to engaging those in our own country, we also continue to reach out to our foreign partners. Secretary Napolitano and I will be attending the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly in Montreal next week with our partners from the Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration, and we look forward to working with the international community in our joint efforts to strengthen the global aviation system.

Cutting-Edge Technology

As we improve our use of intelligence, we also know that effective technology is an essential component of our arsenal to detect and deter threats against our nation's transportation systems. TSA is deploying a range of next generation equipment – bottled liquid scanners, Advanced Technology X-Ray systems, and Explosive Trace Detection (ETD) units – to enhance our efforts.

The most effective technology for detecting small threat items concealed on passengers is Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT). AIT safely and effectively screens passengers for both metallic and non-metallic threats, including weapons and explosives, without physical contact. As of September 17, 2010, TSA has deployed 224 AIT machines to 56 airports nationwide, and our goal is to have nearly 1,000 AIT machines deployed by the end of Calendar Year 2011.

TSA is seeking to enhance the efficiency of using AIT, while also reducing privacy concerns related to this technology, by working with manufacturers, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate, the security industry, and foreign government partners to develop automated threat detection software, also known as Automated Target Recognition (ATR). This is software used with AIT to display a computer-generated generic human image, going even further than the privacy-protected actual image of the passenger as the current technology does. Ongoing ATR testing is designed to ensure effective detection with minimal false alarms.

Strengthening the Workforce

An intelligence-driven agency using sophisticated technological tools to root out terrorists will not succeed without a professional, highly trained, fully engaged, and respected workforce. As I stated above, the men and women of TSA are on the front line in detecting and defeating the terrorist threat. Since becoming the Administrator for TSA, I have logged thousands of miles to meet with them. I have been impressed by their professionalism, work ethic, and enthusiasm. I have listened carefully to their suggestions on improving operations and opportunities, and have learned from their insights. I also have challenged them to hold themselves to the highest standards of hard work, professionalism, and integrity that already are intrinsic parts of TSA's fabric.

I also am working to hone the workforce development strategy and to develop an environment of continuous learning for TSA employees that will help them meet both individual and organizational goals. As we continue to implement new technology to meet emerging threats, TSA routinely evaluates, updates, and upgrades its technical training curriculum. Over the next three months, technical training priorities include an update to procedures at the passenger screening checkpoint and support for the deployment of new technologies such as Advanced Imaging Technology.

We are also working on improving the training for the Transportation Security Inspector (TSI) workforce. Along with revision of the TSI Basic Course on multi-modal training, we are developing and delivering additional courses targeted to specific transportation modes. TSA also recently expanded the Surface Transportation Training Center located in Pueblo, Colorado, which I visited in July. This is an impressive facility that is significantly improving the training we are able to provide.

Through these efforts, we are finding opportunities to integrate elements that not only enhance technical skills, but also contribute to professional development.

We are also engaged in efforts to address and resolve workplace issues. The Ombudsman at TSA is one of many avenues through which TSA employees may raise workplace issues and concerns to see them resolved. As I travel around the country meeting with employees, I have invited employees to raise issues and concerns to me directly, and I have learned that many employees also place great value in established communications channels, such as the National Advisory Council, the Idea Factory, and local Employee Advisory Councils. Nevertheless, I also know from my experience at the FBI that an effective Ombudsman program is a valuable resource for unfiltered, candid feedback on the state of the workplace environment, and I am committed to its advisory role to me and the rest of the TSA leadership team.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to speak with you about TSA's ongoing efforts to ensure the safety and security of the transportation domain. I look forward to your questions.