

Statement of David P. Pecoske
Administrator, Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
November 8, 2017

Good morning Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me here today in my new role as Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to testify about transportation security.

My colleagues at TSA and I appreciate the support of the Committee and its Members in the passage of H.R. 2825, Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act of 2017, and we are grateful for the longstanding and constructive relationship that TSA enjoys with the Committee. I look forward to building on this relationship during my tenure at the helm of TSA.

I am honored by the opportunity to serve as the TSA Administrator. TSA's mission to protect America's transportation systems is vital to our Nation's security. Although I have only been on the job a short time, I am impressed with the dedication and commitment of the men and women of TSA, from those who work behind the scenes and out of public view, to those whose presence at our airport security checkpoints, onboard aircraft, and in our surface transportation venues provide protection to millions of people every day.

In September, we solemnly reflected on the 9/11 attacks. Aviation security operations have come a long way in 16 years, but we still face a determined adversary. The current threat environment is complex, diverse, and persistent; the threat to international aviation is high, and multiple terrorist groups remain intent on attacking civil aviation. Additionally, we must not ignore the real threat to surface transportation.

These terrorist groups are using technology and social media to inspire, direct, and facilitate attacks. We also know they are doing their homework on our countermeasures. They are "crowd-sourcing" terrorism by publishing instructions to build bombs and devices designed to evade airport security or to derail trains; laying out roadmaps for soft target and public area attacks; and calling for their aspirants to hit targets of opportunity, whether at an airport, a passenger railroad station, or an inner city mass transit station.

Certainly, we must adapt to evolving challenges. I believe this adaptation should include three key components: first, we need to continue to raise the global aviation security baseline around the world and surface transportation security domestically in collaboration with our industry and international partners; second, we need to continuously innovate; and third, we need to invest in our most valuable resource, our people.

We continue to work with our partners across the global aviation community to collaborate, innovate, and implement new security practices in the face of evolving threats. To

raise the baseline of international aviation security, TSA issued a Security Directive and Emergency Amendment in June to enhance security measures for all commercial flights to the United States. These measures – some of which are noticeable to passengers and some of which are not – include enhanced screening of passengers and electronic devices, and heightened security standards for all direct flights to the United States from overseas airports.

All of these measures are necessary, given the gravity of current threats. TSA continues to work closely with U.S. aircraft operators, foreign air carriers, as well as host governments as they implement these measures. Also, in September we initiated new measures to address specific threats to cargo aircraft inbound to the United States. These measures require certain carriers to provide additional data to allow TSA, in partnership with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, to better assess the risk of shipments prior to loading. We continue to review ways to address threats and raise the baseline of cargo security screening overseas.

Our industry and government partners know the importance of adapting and innovating to stay ahead of our adversaries and have been critical in the effort to raise the global aviation security baseline. Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not thank the airports and airlines for their support during the summer travel season. This summer was an incredibly busy one for TSA. In fact, it was our busiest summer on record. Between the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, we screened more than 239 million passengers; a 4 percent increase from the 230 million screened during the same period last year. This would not have been possible without the excellent partnerships we have developed with airports and airlines.

TSA continues to engage with our domestic and international stakeholders to share best practices and align security with evolving and emerging threats. We work with industry operators through the Intermodal Security Training and Exercise Program to exercise their security and response plans to prevent and respond to active shooter events or improvised explosive devices, similar to the one recently planted at the airport in Asheville, North Carolina. TSA has also been working with our partners in efforts to increase public area security. Events such as the terror attacks in Brussels and Istanbul, and the January 2017 lone-shooter rampage at Fort Lauderdale Airport, highlight the need for vigilance in the public areas of our Nation's airports, as well as surface transportation venues. It is critical that we learn the lessons of these attacks and use that knowledge to improve security.

To that end, TSA and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Protection and Programs Directorate launched a series of Public Area Security Summits last fall, collaboratively engaging with industry, government, academia, and public officials to establish general principles for success in enhancing public area security. We have had four of these summits so far, with another scheduled for February 2018.

International organizations also play a vital role in advancing TSA's mission to strengthen transportation security around the globe. For example, the United States is a Member State of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), an arm of the United Nations that works with 190 other Member States to set safety and security standards for international air travel, among other things. I recently spoke at ICAO's annual Aviation Security Symposium,

encouraging members to join us in embracing innovation and raising the baseline of global aviation security. This message was echoed throughout the symposium. I will reiterate this message next week at the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) AvSec World Conference in Abu Dhabi.

Another key element in raising the global aviation security baseline is investing in and leveraging new and emerging technologies for screening purposes. Acting Secretary Duke and I will work with this Committee to identify and secure the necessary resources to pursue the most promising technologies. As just one example, TSA is exploring the use of 3D-imaging Computed Tomography systems to meet emerging and evolving threats at airport checkpoints. These systems offer a more enhanced imaging platform over legacy AT x-ray systems and are a proven technology that has been used for screening checked baggage. I believe that Computed Tomography will enhance carry-on screening for the current threats and improve overall checkpoint security effectiveness and efficiency.

Identity verification and vetting are central underpinnings of the passenger security process. To address this capability need, we are actively working multiple paths to evaluate technology for potential future deployment. We have started testing credential authentication technologies at a number of airports. We have also assessed biometric fingerprint reading technology through the Innovation Task Force (ITF). Recently, we collaborated with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection on their biometrics pilot for identity verification of travelers exiting the country. Supporting this pilot is important for ensuring joint requirements across the Department. The intent of these efforts is to move TSA forward in the ability to verify passengers' identity, ticketing, and vetting status.

To further improve the passenger security process, we are working to enhance our on-person screening to include advanced imaging technology. This should increase detection of threats, lower false alarm rates, and increase passenger throughput. Other technologies with promise are mobile handheld solutions that quickly and easily identify explosives.

We will continue to work with public and private partners to provide a platform for government, industry, and stakeholders to gather requirements for new and innovative approaches to transportation security and accelerate the development and deployment of new technologies such as the ones I just described. During the requirements definition process, TSA leverages the robust DHS Joint Requirements Council framework and partners with DHS Science and Technology to develop and leverage cross-component solutions. Additionally, through TSA's ITF, we are seeking to improve collaboration with our partners through two-way knowledge exchanges and co-creation of security technologies. ITF actively seeks new partners and provides industry an opportunity to demonstrate their solutions in the field, capture operational data, and refine solutions against threats to transportation systems.

TSA will continue to partner with industry to make improvements to our operations. We have received strong support from our airport and airline partners in our continued efforts to address increased passenger volumes. These partners provide volume projections to inform resourcing, promote the TSA Pre✓® expedited screening program, and remind passengers to

arrive early. Our industry partners also participate on daily calls with TSA to ensure clear, timely communication regarding daily screening operations. All of this work with industry partners is critical to ensuring that our screening technologies, processes, and systems continue to thrive and adapt.

As important as these technological advances are, the TSA security professional at the checkpoint is vital to accomplishing TSA's mission. Since my arrival at TSA, I made it a priority to visit many airports and engage in direct conversations with frontline TSA employees. After hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, I traveled to Houston, St. Thomas, San Juan, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, and Orlando to help our TSA colleagues get back on their feet and to ensure they received all the help we could offer. I listened to them and learned about TSA's operations and the challenges they face doing their jobs. I am consistently impressed and inspired by the dedication and commitment that they display, and I quickly realized just how passionate TSA employees are about our mission. This passion is reflected in the 885 TSA employees who deployed to support hurricane relief efforts through the DHS Surge Capacity Force, and I am immensely grateful to them. They represent the very best of TSA. I also appreciate the assistance of deployed Officers, the TSA Critical Incident Management Group, field leadership, and our airport and airline partners to reconstitute operations at affected airports.

Our workforce carries out a difficult and demanding mission every day. TSA employees vet a daily average of 2.3 million air passengers against the Terrorist Screening Database before they arrive at airports for screening, and routinely prevent known or suspected terrorists from boarding aircraft. Last year alone, our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) screened more than 760 million passengers and more than 2 billion carry-ons and checked bags at approximately 440 airports nationwide. They prevented countless dangerous prohibited items from being carried onto planes, including over 3,000 firearms. In addition, TSA's Federal Air Marshals deployed on more than 250,000 domestic and international flights last year. Over 1,000 canine teams patrolled more than 100 aviation, mass transit, and maritime transportation locations across the Nation. Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams augmented transportation security nationwide, and recently, a number of VIPR teams contributed significantly to hurricane relief in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. Last year, TSA's international inspectors completed more than 1,880 aircraft operator inspections and 135 foreign airport assessments to ensure compliance with international standards and TSA security requirements.

To carry out our activities effectively, we need to invest in our workforce, especially in key areas such as training and communication, to take TSA to the next level as an organization. We all benefit from an engaged workforce that feels connected to the mission and direction of the organization. I am committed to communicating directly with our employees and making sure they know they are valued and that their work is critically important.

In support of our managers, we are leveraging Acting Secretary Duke's launch of a "Year of Leadership." This is an initiative to reinforce DHS's culture of leadership excellence that

allows supervisors and managers to receive the training and education that effective leadership requires.

In 2012, TSA established the TSA Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's Glynco campus, to increase the rigor and professionalism of the training that TSA employees receive. Although the Academy initially focused on training supervisory screening personnel, in January 2016, it began new-hire training for all TSOs. The TSA Academy has been a powerful tool for fostering a consistent training environment and helping to spread best practices and process innovations across TSA. The TSA Academy has already demonstrated clear value to TSA in terms of morale and aviation security effectiveness, and I am dedicated to the use of the Academy during my tenure and emphasizing the need to develop TSA leaders at all levels, harnessing the "Year of Leadership" effort as a catalyst.

I believe that successfully meeting the ever-changing threat to aviation rests on our own evolution, both in TSA and in the global aviation sector. We must raise the security baseline by staying abreast of threats and quickly implementing effective countermeasures. We must innovate so we can detect more complex threats and prohibited items ever more quickly, consistently, and efficiently. We must ensure that our workforce receives the best training available and is as connected to the TSA enterprise as it is to its mission.

I would like to take the opportunity to touch on the security of our Nation's surface transportation. Recent overseas terror attacks, including the Brussels subway attack and increasing vehicle ramming incidents, provide a compelling reminder of the need to remain vigilant. While there is no specific, credible terrorist threat to U.S. surface transportation systems, the recent incidents in Europe underscore the need to continue to build upon our surface transportation security successes through stakeholder communication, coordination, and collaboration to protect these "open-by-nature" systems. To better understand the unique nature of these systems, I will engage with key industry stakeholders on an ongoing basis. I recently met with pipeline industry leaders at the Pipeline International Security Forum in Buffalo, NY. I also toured and received security briefings from New York Metropolitan Transit Authority, New Jersey Transit, and Amtrak, which constitute some of the heaviest travelled systems in the country. I have also invited key stakeholders from all the surface modes to meet me at TSA and give me their views on how TSA can help them improve security.

In closing, I believe a reinvigorated strategy is an essential foundation for success in our mission, and I have engaged my executive staff, with their years of experience, to reexamine and, if appropriate, to re-envision TSA's strategy. I have also recently engaged many private sector industry partners to improve strategic partnerships and promote effective collaboration, and I look forward to ongoing engagement with members of this committee as we develop our strategic path forward for TSA.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am honored to serve in this capacity and I look forward to your questions.