

Opening Statement of
Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX-18), as prepared
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
Committee on Homeland Security

“General Aviation Security: Assessing Risks and the Road Ahead”

Today, we are here to discuss the critical issue of securing our general aviation system.

We will consider the risks facing general aviation generally; whether a regulatory regime is required; whether we are doing enough to secure inbound general aviation aircraft from being utilized to transport or deploy WMD; and we will hear perspectives from non-governmental stakeholders.

The general aviation industry is a vital component to our economy, having an economic impact of \$100 billion annually, supporting 1.3 million jobs. General aviation encompasses aircraft of virtually every size that perform a wide variety of missions, from crop-dusting to large passenger charters. Further, international inbound general aviation accounts for about 400 flights per day. Most – about 75% – are from Canada and Mexico, and the remainder is from a variety of countries.

Last year, TSA released its Large Aircraft Security Program rulemaking for general aviation security and, while I think it is imperative that the Federal government look at risks and address them, it is clear that this rulemaking process did not take into account some serious concerns raised by stakeholders.

Led by Chairman Thompson, this Committee expressed its concern with TSA’s Large Aircraft Security Program. Today, we will hear from TSA—and industry—about whether the process has been improved and what the final rule may look like.

Under my leadership, the House recently approved H.R. 2200 with overwhelming support. The bill includes provisions to significantly improve stakeholder input into TSA programs and policies for general aviation. It is important for us to discuss the rule for general aviation security, but it is equally important for this hearing to also consider whether DHS—as a whole—is doing all it should to secure general aviation.

In his recent book, “The Inheritance: The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power,” the chief Washington correspondent for the New York Times, David Sanger, interviews Vayl Oxford, the former director of the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office at DHS. In the book, Oxford considers the prospect of someone flying a nuclear weapon into the United States on a private plane and then detonating it in the air over a major city. In the book, Oxford asserts: “My worry is that you wouldn’t even have to land the jet.” Accordingly, staff has been looking into this hypothetical to determine what the Department is doing to mitigate such a risk.

Regrettably, TSA and the rest of DHS do not seem to have a harmonious approach to this problem. Entities, such as TSA, assume that other components, like CBP, are taking measures that they are, in fact, not taking. Today, we will try to learn from DNDO about the risks posed by inbound general aviation; how the Department is attempting to mitigate such risks; and what we, in the Congress, can do to help.

I think today’s hearing will lay important markers about general aviation security and how DHS can more efficiently harness its resources. My Subcommittee stands ready to provide DHS with the support it needs to keep the American people safe.