

**Chairman Johnson Opening Statement**  
**“Frustrated Travelers: Rethinking TSA Operations to Improve Passenger Screening and Address Threats to Aviation”**

**Tuesday, June 07, 2016**

*As submitted for the record:*

We have convened this hearing to examine the actions of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to address wait times at United States airports and prevent terrorist activity threatening our nation's aviation system.

The TSA's mission is to protect the air transportation system to ensure freedom of movement and commerce. In fiscal year 2015, the TSA screened approximately 695 million passengers and 2 billion carry-on and checked bags.

Since February, numerous media reports have highlighted the growing frustration with lengthy wait times at TSA security checkpoints. On May 15, 2016, 450 travelers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport missed their flights due to a three-hour wait in the TSA line. As delays have become pervasive, many airport officials have expressed interest in privatizing security operations.

Today we will discuss possible solutions to reduce wait times while still considering security standards. First, the TSA can optimize passenger screening by increasing the number of explosive detection canine units at airports. At a March hearing, experts told this committee that dogs are more effective and efficient than technology because dogs can process multiple passengers and bags simultaneously. In recent testimony before the committee, Department of Homeland Security Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas stated that canine units “are in fact an extraordinarily effective tool, both from a security perspective and critically for a throughput perspective.”

Second, the TSA can utilize the Screening Partnership Program (SPP), which permits airport officials to apply to have passenger and baggage screening performed by private contractors. Currently, there are 22 airports participating in the SPP, including San Francisco International and Orlando's Sanford International.

Third, expanding the TSA's trusted traveler program, TSA Precheck, can help expedite the screening process at more than 167 airports. On Jan. 13, 2016, the TSA achieved a milestone, announcing that 2 million passengers had enrolled in TSA Precheck.

However, the TSA still needs to improve the program. In my state, travelers have expressed frustration with enrollment and adjudication delays. Wisconsin is one of two states in the country where enrollment centers are fully booked, forcing Wisconsinites to wait 45 days for an appointment. This delay is entirely avoidable, as 200 additional enrollment adjudicators stand ready to work, but are awaiting final TSA approval. If the TSA would act on these applications, wait times for Precheck would likely immediately go down.

Finally, the March 22 coordinated bombings at the Brussels airport and the May 19 crash involving Egypt Air flight MS 804 serve as two clear examples of terrorist organizations continuing to target commercial aircraft. Given the threats we face to aviation security, we must also ensure that the TSA is adapting to the evolving threat environment.

I thank the witnesses for being here today to discuss these important issues, and I look forward to your testimony.