

Statement of
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on Behalf of
the American Association of Airport Executives
and
Airports Council International-North American
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Chairman Hollings, Ranking Member McCain and members of the Senate Commerce Committee, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on aviation security. I am testifying today on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) and Airports Council International-North America (ACI-NA). ACI-NA represents local, regional and state governing bodies that own and operate commercial airports in the United States and Canada. AAAE represents the men and women who manage the primary, commercial service, reliever and general aviation airports. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss ways that we can work together to improve aviation security.

I know I speak on behalf of all AAAE and ACI-NA members throughout the United States and Canada when I say our thoughts and prayers go out to those who suffered as result of the terrorist attacks that occurred last week. The fact that terrorists hijacked four commercial airlines to carry out their attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is particularly troubling to our members because they consider passenger safety and security to be their most important responsibilities.

Our hearts also go out to our friends and colleagues who work for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Port Authority, of course, operates John F. Kennedy International, LaGuardia, Newark International and Teterboro airports. Until last week the Port Authority's aviation department was located on the 65th floor of One World Trade Center -- the first tower struck by American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles. From reports that we have received, it appears that most of those who served in the aviation department were able to escape the north tower before it collapsed.

Unfortunately, approximately seventy of their colleagues from the Port Authority are still missing. Many of those are law enforcement officers from the Port Authority who were trying to help people evacuate the World Trade Center. We will never forget that they and so many police officers, firefighters, and office workers risked their lives in an effort to save others.

In a speech that he gave at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall proposed that the United States help to rebuild Europe after World War II. More than 40 years later, the United States must repair the destruction that occurred in

our own country after terrorists struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. There is no question that we will rebuild the financial district in New York City and repair damage done to the Pentagon. But I would suggest that all of us with an interest in aviation need to work together on a Marshall Plan for improving airport and airline security. We simply cannot allow the hijackings and terrorist attacks that occurred last week to happen ever again.

On Monday, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta formed two rapid-response teams to make recommendations on improving aviation security. One will focus on ways to improve aircraft security, and the other improving airport security. I am honored that the Secretary asked me to work on the airport team. I look forward to working with him, Deputy Secretary of Transportation Michael Jackson, Federal Aviation Administrator Jane Garvey and the other members of the rapid response teams to propose new security requirements to protect the safety of the flying public.

But as you have been asked to do so many times before, members of the Senate Commerce Committee and others in Congress will need to play a key role in developing solutions to the security shortfalls that we experienced last week. This Committee, under the guidance of Chairman Hollings, Ranking Member McCain, Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison, has a long track record on improving aviation security, and all of you should be commended for your leadership on this issue. I am also pleased that members of this Committee and others in Congress are continuing to propose constructive ways to improve aviation security in the aftermath of

last weeks terrorist attacks. I look forward to working with you to explore those and other opportunities to enhance airport and airline security.

After the terrorist attacks that occurred last week, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) promptly closed our nation's commercial airspace system and issued two emergency amendments that included several security initiatives. I think the Administration, Secretary Mineta, and Administrator Garvey deserve a great deal of credit for their quick response during this national crisis. I also applaud the leadership and staffs of the nation's airports that have been working with Department of Transportation (DOT) and FAA officials at an extraordinary pace to heighten security and resume air travel.

As all of you know, airports and airlines were required to implement these new security measures before being allowed to resume their operations. Airports, for instance, were immediately required to deploy more law enforcement officials and K-9 units, increase security inspections throughout their facilities, strengthen access control measures and remove all vehicles parked near their terminal buildings. In addition to the new security measures that were implemented in recent days, I think there are many other options that Congress and the Administration should explore in an effort enhance security at our nation's airports. I would like to take a moment to outline some proposals for your consideration.

Use Well-Trained Security Professionals to Screen Passengers and Baggage: As all of you know, airlines are responsible for screening passengers and their carry-on baggage for weapons and explosives, and carriers usually contract security companies to hire and train screeners. The numerous shortcomings of the current system have been well documented. Last year, the General Accounting Office reported that screeners who operate checkpoints have "had difficulty in detecting dangerous objects, missing as many as 20 percent during tests." The agency cited rapid turnover of screener personnel and low wages as major causes of poor performance.

In light of the hijackings that occurred last week, it is now more important than ever that steps be taken to improve the way we screen passengers and their carry-on baggage. The key issue, in our view, is to improve the training, testing, and thereby the proficiency of those individuals conducting the screening of passengers and baggage. I know many in Congress and the aviation industry have called for federalizing screeners. But ultimately the more immediate need is to professionalize aviation security personnel. It is important to note that federalization does not necessarily mean hiring federal law enforcement officers.

At most federal facilities today, checkpoints are operated by contract employees. If this option were to be exercised at airport screening checkpoints, there may be no significant difference between a screener contracted by the Federal Government and a screener working for a security company contracted by the airlines. One proposal is to have federal law enforcement conducting the screening. In any event, the issue is performance

standards, not just responsibility for oversight. For that reason, we hope that any solution -- whether it include hiring federal law enforcement officials or federalizing those who screen passengers and their carry-on baggage -- result in adequately compensated screeners who are trained and tested to a level of proficiency much higher than currently required of commercial screeners.

Deploy Explosive Detection Systems at More Airports: We also need to provide screeners with better equipment. There are a number of innovative technologies that have made detection of explosives and other deadly or dangerous weapons easier to identify. While these systems are commonly viewed as only as effective as the trained personnel who operate them, they are an increasingly essential facet of the aviation security equation. The integration of a new generation of Explosive Detection Systems (EDS), as called for by the 1996 Presidential Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism, has been an important addition to our efforts to improve the security of our aviation system. These and other new technologies must be integrated into the nation's airports at a much quicker pace and with increased attention to the resources, training and infrastructure requirements necessary for their effective use.

As with any technology, planning and training are critical to realizing the potential of explosive and other weapons detection systems. A significant number of the new generation explosive detection systems are being used at 46 airports around the country. We need to deploy more explosive detection systems at airports of all sizes through a much more swift and coordinated process.

The FAA, through its Security Equipment Integrated Product Team, has been responsible for the purchase and deployment of these systems throughout major airports around the country. They are commonly used for baggage screening of the traveling public, but a higher priority needs to be placed on better coordination with industry on where they are deployed both throughout the system and within individual airports.

EDS baggage screening machines and other resource intensive security technologies come with significant infrastructure, maintenance and training requirements. Terminal and baggage handling areas must be redesigned to accommodate these systems. Airport and airline personnel must be trained on their proper operation and maintenance. In many instances, structural and electrical capabilities may need to be upgraded to accommodate them. All of these elements must be provided for in advance of their deployment, which has unfortunately not always been the case. If it is agreed that the best technologies must be deployed to combat terrorist threats, then it must be done with proper planning, coordination and resources.

Use New Technology to Tighten Access to Secure Areas in and around Airport

Terminals: In addition to improving the screening process for passengers and baggage, we need to do a better job of controlling access to secure areas in and around airport terminals. Last year, the DOT Inspector General highlighted the shortcomings in access control technology and procedures at some airports around the country. This is an issue that airport operators take seriously, and we need to continue to improve procedures and

deploy new technology to tighten the perimeter of secure areas. Controlling these critical access points is key to improving aviation security and will require capital improvements as well as an increase in research and development efforts.

Enhanced technology should not only be applied to access control measures but to the process of screening personnel entering the secure areas as well. Understanding that the secure area of most airports is an operational area, this will be a daunting task. While there are policy measures that can be taken such as restricting the type and amount of personal possessions that may be carried into the secure area as a matter of course this may not prove to be sufficient. Ideally, each access point from the public to the secure area would be equipped with security screening equipment and trained personnel.

Conduct Background Checks on Those Who Have Access to Secure Areas: Better technology is only part of the equation. Just as we need to have better trained screeners, we must also focus on eliminating undesirable behavior that can nullify even the best technology used to control secure areas. Toward that goal, it is essential that we concentrate our efforts on ensuring that only those persons who have undergone thorough background checks are granted access to secure areas.

Last year, Senator Hutchison introduced S. 2440, the Airport Security Improvement Act of 2000. Like many on this Committee, we strongly supported that legislation because it called on the FAA to work with air carriers and airport operators to strengthen procedures to prevent unauthorized access to secure areas and commercial aircraft. The bill, which

was enacted into law on November 22, 2000, requires criminal background checks for security screeners and others who have access to secure areas in the top twenty most at risk airports. The legislation requires background checks for those at other airports to be phased-in over three years. It also requires the FAA to expand and accelerate the Electronic Fingerprint Transmission Pilot program.

In light of recent events, we think the FAA should accelerate the phase-in period for criminal history record checks and allow all airports to utilize the electronic fingerprint assessment technology immediately. It is imperative that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) give these background checks priority consideration and that the agency be given the necessary resources to process them in a timely manner.

Since the aviation system has been targeted as means of carrying out terrorist activity, we believe that the current criteria applied in assessing who is allowed access to secure areas are inadequate. Airport operators are currently restricted by law to assessing records of convictions for very specific crimes, and we think that the range of activities subject to that assessment should be broadened. We are also aware that various federal agencies keep records of persons with the propensity to commit acts of violence and or terrorism. Airports should be able to submit queries to a single federal entity to have applicants for positions requiring unescorted access vetted against such lists. We believe that this federal entity should take the lead to query all other federal agencies with an interest in terrorist issues to ensure that personnel to whom we grant unescorted access are not suspected of or directly involved in terrorist activity.

Increase the Number of Law Enforcement Officials and K-9 Units at Airports: As I mentioned earlier in my statement, the new security measures that the DOT issued last week required airports to increase the number of uniformed security patrols or law enforcement officials at their facilities. Visible security patrols and uniformed law enforcement officials have proven to be an extremely effective deterrent to acts of violence in airports. The mere presence of uniformed officers at and around screening checkpoints has reduced the number of passengers attempting to circumvent the checkpoint.

Due in part because these programs have been so successful, many have argued for an increase in the number of trained law enforcement officers present in the public and the secure area of airports. Currently the number of officers is small, and our forces are stretched thin across the airport system. We believe that more law enforcement officials should be a permanent addition to airport security and that it is incumbent upon Congress and the Administration to make sure airports have the resources they will need to pay for the additional security.

FAA certified K-9 teams are an important component of an airport's ability to screen passengers and their baggage. The FAA is recognized as having a premier K-9 program. The problem is there are simply not enough FAA certified K-9 units to go around. It is our understanding that K-9 teams from other federal agencies are trained to a different standard than the FAA teams and are therefore not authorized for use to comply with

FAA security directives. We strongly believe that the FAA should expand its K-9 program to improve security at more airports. In the meantime, we hope the FAA will consider allowing airports to use K-9 teams trained by other agencies.

Disseminate Intelligence to a Designated Airport Security Coordinator: The FBI, Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence agencies each play their own part in monitoring, identifying and assessing threats to national security. Some of the information processed by this intelligence community identifies potential threats to the safety of civil aviation, and some of this information is shared with offices in the DOT and FAA. However, very little of this critical data is shared with the front line airport and airline personnel responsible for implementing security procedures.

Aviation security needs to be among the top priorities of the intelligence agencies responsible for identifying terrorist threats. Coordination of intelligence dissemination with the Secretary's Office of Intelligence and Security, appropriate FAA staff and finally airport security coordinators will dramatically increase the likelihood that real threats to the system are met with real local response and preparedness.

As a direct result of the recommendations from the 1996 Presidential Commission on Aviation Safety and Security, aviation security consortia were formed and vested with the authority to work cooperatively with federal regulators to meet the goals of increased aviation security. This increase in the level of effective communication and cooperation

has steadily improved the baseline of aviation security. With the events that occurred last week, this type of government and industry cooperation is particularly important. Airport security professionals play a key role in developing, implementing and maintaining effective security measures, and their input should be used as we develop new ways to increase aviation security.

Deploy Federal Security Managers at More Airports: The FAA is responsible for providing threat information to airports and establishing aviation security policies and regulations. The agency's Civil Aviation Security Operations Office has deployed Federal Security Managers to the nation's highest risk airports to assist in coordinating security efforts. This program was originally intended to give these airports direct access to the Associate Administrator for Civil Aviation Security in times of heightened concern. But the scope must be expanded to provide similar coordinated efforts at more airports.

Again, these are just some options that I think Congress and the Administration should explore in an effort to enhance security at our nation's airports. Many of the proposals, such as providing a better screening process, would increase security at airports and on commercial airlines. I know many in Congress have proposed expanding the FAA's Federal Air Marshal program as a way to deter to air piracy. While airports don't play a role in the Air Marshal program, I think this week's announcement by the Attorney General regarding the expansion of the program is an extremely positive and important step.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make two final points. First, a number of the mandated security measures that I described earlier in my testimony have resulted in significant cost increases for the nation's airports. There is no question that these are important to our efforts to enhance aviation security and absolutely necessary given the horrific events that occurred last week. It is our hope that as Congress considers legislation to help the airline industry funds will also be made available to airports for compliance with the new mandated security initiative imposed by the FAA.

I would also like take a moment to discuss Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Given the airport's proximity to the White House, the Capitol and other federal buildings and monuments in the Washington metropolitan area, I understand the concerns that some have raised about the possibility that the airport could be used for future terrorist attacks. Those are legitimate concerns that need to be adequately addressed, and additional security measures that should be taken by the airport and the airlines that fly in and out of Washington, D.C. But in the end, I hope the debate will be about how we reopen National Airport -- not if we reopen it. As US Airways Chairman Stephen M. Wolf recently said, "Closing Reagan National Airport is an unacceptable visible win for terrorism."

In what has become known as the Marshall Plan Speech, Secretary Marshall said:

...I need not tell you gentlemen, that the world situation is very serious. That must be apparent to all intelligent people. I think one difficulty is that the problem is one of such enormous complexity that the very mass of facts presented to the public by press and radio make it exceedingly difficult for the man in the street to reach a clear appraisal of the situation.

Those comments could easily describe the confusion that all of us felt after the terrorist attacks that occurred last week. But just as the United States successfully helped to rebuild Europe, so too can we can strengthen the security of our aviation system. All of us will need to work together, and all of us will need to make some sacrifices. But I'm confident that we can overcome the challenges ahead.

Chairman Hollings, Ranking Member McCain, and members of the Senate Commerce Committee, thank you again for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on aviation security. All of us at ACI-NA and AAAE look forward to working with you and others in the aviation industry during the days and weeks ahead on ways to enhance airport and airline security.