

Response to Senate Committee on Commerce by Tori Barnes

June 2, 2020

Q: The FY 2021 budget request proposes to eliminate the Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams. How would the Administration's proposed elimination of VIPR teams impact transportation security, especially when teams are using explosive detection canines?

A: At U.S. Travel, we have always said that without security there can be no travel. To the traveler, security is both physical, having themselves and their luggage screened, and perceived, seeing security throughout the premises and having confidence in their protection from harm. Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams serve both purposes by providing explosive detecting canines the ability to seek out potential threats and by having these teams visible throughout transportation hubs.

In the fiscal year 2021 proposed budget, VIPR funding would drop to \$15 million from \$58 million and the number of VIPR teams would be cut to 8 from 31, with 277 full time TSA positions being eliminated. TSA is already facing a host of workforce issues that make it difficult to secure America's air, rail, and maritime transportation systems. Reducing VIPR teams would detract from the TSA's mission and the travelers perception of security.

While some detractors have questioned the effectiveness of VIPR teams, primarily based in difficulty measuring defining efficiency, the success of explosive seeking canines has been widely heralded. Limiting VIPR teams, which utilize canines, would simply shift costs to local law enforcement, putting further strain on law enforcement and airport personnel.

Q: Last year, Congress provided \$46.3 million for the Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) reimbursement program. Airport operators are required by statute to have a law enforcement presence at or near security checkpoints to respond to threats that may be discovered during the TSA screening process, as TSA's frontline personnel do not have the authority to detain individuals or make arrests. Currently, 300 airports have agreements with TSA that partially reimburse airports for LEOs who respond to possible threats discovered during the TSA screening process. How would the FY 2021 request to eliminate funding for TSA's LEO reimbursement program impact the security of the traveling public?

A: Airports are statutorily required to maintain a law-enforcement presence in addition to the security screening provided by TSA officers, who are not authorized to detain or arrest individuals. Law enforcement at airports have a dual mission: to maintain a safe and secure environment within the airport and to respond to any potential threat to airport security. Law enforcement is critical to our airports, and eliminating the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program would simply shift costs to local law enforcement, which we believe is imprudent and harmful to the overall safety and security of our transportation hubs.

Q: The FY 2021 budget request assumes Congress will permit TSA to shift exit lane access control responsibilities to airport authorities, as the Administration has proposed for the past three fiscal years. Why is it important that TSA remain responsible for exit lane staffing at airports?

A: TSA is currently staffing exit lanes at 115 airports where exit lanes are co-located with passenger screening at a cost of \$77 million annually. The American Association of Airport Executives has cited the true cost to shift exit-lane responsibility to airports or local law enforcement could reach \$200 million, nearly three times the cost to TSA. If airports are told to undertake this burden it could be financially devastating for airports, at a time when their revenue is at historic lows due to COVID-19. Shifting exit lane access responsibility to airports would simply amount to an unfunded mandate that airports cannot afford, and unnecessarily risk the safety and security of airports.

Q: The CARES Act provided \$100 million to airports for janitorial services. How do these support services enhance passenger and TSO safety?

A: We asked for feedback from some of our large hub airports. One of our large hub airports has suggested that restrictions put on the use of these funds by TSA has significantly limited the effectiveness of these funds. Another told us that funds had not yet been provided.

TSA has told airports that these funds may only be used to provide sterilization and janitorial services at checked bag drop, TSA checkpoints, or TSA offices. Limiting the scope of janitorial services to these locations minimizes the effectiveness of cleaning and provides little relief to airports. Such restrictive application limits reimbursement costs to a few thousand dollars a month. We believe these restrictions are inconsistent with the intended purpose of this funding. Bag drop locations and TSA checkpoints are a mere fraction of the areas travelers must navigate in order to fly commercially. Airports should be reimbursed for effective cleaning and sterilization throughout the entire airport facility, not just those areas under TSA jurisdiction.

TSA should expand the use of CARES Act janitorial services to include all highly trafficked or high-touch areas at airports, including restrooms, food service, seating, and touched surfaces.

Airports are facing historic revenue shortfalls and increased budget demands that not only require greater flexibility under CARES Act funding, but will also require Congress to provide additional federal assistance during the duration of this health emergency and recovery. Shelter in place orders around the country have shrunk workforces, requiring employees to work longer hours, resulting in overtime costs to airports. Increased demand for sterilization supplies like hand sanitizers and cleaning wipes has also increased the cost of supplies. The needed quantity of these supplies has also increased as janitorial services needs have increased. Additionally, new equipment designed to disinfect large areas must be procured to effectively manage cleaning, which will also incur training costs and administrative procedures. At the same time, airports are struggling to cover existing operational costs due to reduced revenue from passengers, vendor commissions, parking fees, gate fees, and other revenue streams. All of these factors contribute to the need for additional financial relief throughout the duration of this crisis.

Q: The TSA Modernization Act required the development of standards that allow for the use of third-party explosives detection canines in the screening of passengers, property, and air cargo in order to increase the supply and deployment of canines at airports. On December 21, 2018, the first third-party canine team conducted an air cargo inspection under the certified cargo screening facility canine program (CCSF-K9). Currently, 13 certifying organizations are permitted to designate a team under the CCSF-K9 program. What opportunities do you see for TSA to increase the use of third-party canines?

A: TSA should use third-party canines to supplement, not supplant, their regular security operations. Canines are remarkably effective at the detection of explosive materials, and they should be utilized more regularly throughout the travel process. Specifically, train stations and marine ports, that have much less rigorous security than TSA checkpoints at airports could substantially benefit from increased investment and application of explosive detecting canine screening. Increasing canine teams would allow TSA to better fulfill its mission at non-commercial air service locations.

Q: The FY 2021 budget request seeks \$28.9 million for the procurement and deployment of Checkpoint Property Screening Systems, particularly computed tomography (CT) technology. CT units are arguably the most effective property screening technology currently available. However, CT deployment may cause increased passenger wait times and staffing needs at checkpoints when configured without proper support equipment. What options should TSA consider to optimize checkpoint flow and nationwide CT deployment without requiring a net increase in checkpoint staffing or increasing passenger wait times?

A: The Travel industry welcomes the rollout of computed tomography (CT) technology screening to upgrade today's dated x-ray technology. The promise that CT technology will allow more efficient baggage screening for travelers at the checkpoint requires proper training and planning. The technology will allow TSA to eliminate the requirement that travelers remove liquids or electronics from their baggage before screening. This will save travelers the time and hassle of current requirements, and provide TSO's better images, and certainty, to assess security compliance.

It is worth noting that just as technology has eliminated the need for travelers to remove liquids, electronics, and other personal items from their baggage, technology exists today that would allow travelers to also avoid removing identification from their wallets. Biometric identification, currently being piloted by both Customs and Border Patrol and TSA has the capability to accurately verify a traveler's identity, verify a traveler's flight reservation, and ensure that individual is safe to fly. When CT technology and biometric identification are combined the result will allow faster screening for travelers, shorter lines, and a more pleasant experience for travelers while also improving security—a win-win.

TSA has deployed CT technology at 17 of America's largest airports, but every airport's security hall is different with unique benefits and challenges. As a result, collaboration between TSA and airports will be essential to the deployment of CT scanners. Working with airports to effectively plan, size, and scale the deployment of scanners will require resources including training, signage for informing travelers of new procedures, and in some cases construction costs to reconfigure security halls. Procuring longer tables for loading and divesting baggage will also help promote throughput with these machines. Prior to full deployment, TSA should stress-test both employees and equipment for efficiency at both the general population lanes and TSA PreCheck lanes to ensure protocols are able to meet security and traveler needs.

Q: The FY 2021 President's Budget proposes \$2.3 million to finalize the procurement and deployment of 1,520 Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) units to airports nationwide. These CAT units are a significant technological advancement from the equipment currently used for identity verification. Are TSA's deployment timeline and funding request sufficient to meet its aviation security mission?

A: The implementation for Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) units at TSA checkpoints will be a significant technological jump for TSA that is, even before full implementation, already behind technological capabilities readily available today.

The difference that CAT units will provide to the traveler at the checkpoint is that CAT only requires the traveler provide their identification instead of identification and boarding pass. Travelers will still hand their identification to a TSA agent, who will insert or scan the identification, just like boarding passes are scanned today. Instead, of seeing the passengers name appear on the scanner, as occurs today, the CAT system will simply provide a go/no-go response after the identity document has been verified and the biographic information confirms an existing flight itinerary through the Secure Flight database. This process alleviates the TSO from matching the name on the identification to the name provided by the boarding pass reader. TSA espouses the security benefit of CAT as automating the identification verification that TSO's perform manually today. While we agree that identity verification is an essential piece of security, the CAT unit systems we are discussing miss the opportunity to improve security and efficiency and fall behind technology readily available today.

TSA has shared with us that they have requested from Congress \$87 million to procure and expedite upgrading CAT units, that aren't even fully deployed yet. The upgraded version, Credential Authentication Technology with Camera (CAT-C) is the technological upgrade the Travel industry believes this committee should be focused on.

First, TSA has shared plans to eventually make CAT-C units fully touchless, promoting hygienic travel. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, travelers habits will change, and we expect travelers to expect more sterile, hygienic identification solutions. TSA has shared plans to pilot automated CAT-C units in three airports this fall while continuing to develop and test the back-end infrastructure to allow fully touchless biometric identification, however CBP's biometric entry/exit system already has this capability and is being operationalized at airports currently. The travel industry believes this system will work best, in the beginning, for travelers who have already opted-in to providing the government their photo, such as passport holders, Global Entry enrollees, and Registered Traveler Program participants. This system will match a travelers face to their already provided government photo instantaneously while also verifying their flight information through the Secure Flight database.

Second, CAT-C units can be fully automated promoting greater efficiency. Similar to the self-checkout aisle at the grocery store, a traveler could use a CAT-C kiosk without having to face, interact, or touch another person. The traveler would step up to the CAT-C unit, scan their photo identification, and the CAT-C machine will verify the photo on the identification matches the face of the individual while simultaneously verifying flight reservations. This structure of identification is more accurate than manual verification that happens today, therefore more secure, and provides greater efficiency.

Third, in the interim, the CAT-C unit can replace the boarding pass reader most widely used at airports, to create some added efficiency while airports and TSA collaborate on planning, stress testing, and deploying CAT-C units to measurably move security and efficiency forward.

It is also important to note that the structure of the CAT-C technology addresses many of the privacy and accuracy concerns associated with biometrics. Today CAT-C units are capable of matching a traveler's face to their provided identification (which is done manually today) in a match/doesn't match manner, decreasing the error rate to statistically zero. In the future, we understand TSA will be able to use previously provided (opted-in) identification documents, to match to a traveler in real time in much the same way. In these scenarios technology is being asked: does the person in front of the camera have the same identifying facial features as either the face on the identification or a face in a specific database of opted-in travelers expected at the airport that day. Also, because the purpose of the camera is simply to verify a traveler's information, the photo is not retained and is destroyed.

Lastly, TSA's partners in the Registered Traveler Program should have access to the Secure Flight Database to ensure parity for the traveler and efficiency at the checkpoint. Registered Traveler Program participants use higher data security standards that TSA currently uses, and provide technologically advanced opportunities to travelers TSA is not yet capable of providing. U.S. Travel supports the Registered Traveler Act, S. 3730, as introduced by Sen. Sullivan, which will clarify and reinforce the Registered Traveler Program's benefit to the security and efficiency of the traveling public.

Q: What would be the benefits to aviation security and passenger/TSO safety if TSA introduced self-service and automated biometrics verification into checkpoints?

A: Benefits to security, health and safety, and facilitation would be significant. As previously mentioned, TSA has the technology to automate identification at the checkpoint today, but procurement and a lack of resources are slowing down these security advancements. TSA has told us they plan to pilot automated and self-service identity verification with CAT-C units in 3 airports beginning this fall.

The promise of automatic biometric identity verification has many benefits. First, self-service and automation create a more sterile environment for both travelers and TSOs by minimizing or eliminating the need for travelers and TSOs to touch documents, equipment, or one another, significantly reducing the spread of germs. Second, using technology to verify identification documents and travelers is more accurate than manual verification, strengthening security. Third, shaving even a few seconds off each traveler's identity and boarding pass verification will significantly shrink the time travelers spend congested in screening lines, promoting both health and efficiency. Next, automation will free TSOs to respond and focus on threats and other potential risks, reducing workforce strains while also increasing operational capacity and efficacy. This will allow TSA to improve security in areas they don't currently provide consistent coverage in, such as train stations and seaports.

Q: The Government Accountability Office, Department of Homeland Security Inspector General, and other independent testers have found canine teams to be one of the most effective means of detecting explosive substances. However, TSA's ability to procure and deploy canines is currently hampered by a limited supply of canines, a lengthy training process, and a limited number of training locations. How would eliminating VIPR teams, as the FY 2021 budget request proposes, impact transportation security?

A: Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams serve two primary security purposes. First, is the physical security provided by explosive detecting canines and response to security threats within TSA's jurisdiction. Second, VIPR teams mobility throughout transportation hubs create a deterrence through visibility as well as reinforce a perception of threat readiness. While the former is measurably and verifiably effective, the later is more difficult to appraise—yet still critical to the travel economy.

Travelers want to know they are safe when they travel. Without security, there can be no travel, thus necessitating the need for not only covert measures, but also overt measures. The travel industry supports the additional layer of security and confidence VIPR teams bring to transportation hubs and the traveler.

Eliminating VIPR teams, as the President's budget request proposes, would simply shift costs to airports and local law enforcement, who are required to maintain law enforcement at the transportation hub. This amounts to a deepening of the unfunded mandate placed on airports and local law enforcement. For the expense, scarcity, and training required for canines, the costs are exponentially greater.