MEDIA INFORMATION

Congresswoman

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CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE CHAIRS MARK UP HEARING TO STRENGTHEN HOMELAND SECURITY LEGISLATION

Washington, DC- Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Chair of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, released the following statement at a mark-up hearing:

"I would like to take this time to thank everyone for their participation in this morning's mark-up. As we are all very aware, our work securing the homeland is never done, and today we take up four bills that will take us forward in our mission to make the homeland more .secure. The four bills we take up today are, in no particular order: HR 5909, by Ms. Lowey; H. Res. 1150, introduced by me; HR 4749, by the ranking member of the full committee Mr. King; and HR 4179, by Ms. Clarke.

"HR 5909, the 'COVERT Act of 2008' will further shore up the gaps in our testing and evaluation protocols for transportation security. As we've seen in the past year, the details of covert tests and evaluations have been disseminated to the screener workforce, thereby 'tipping-off' those we are trying to accurately and responsibly test. The COVERT Act of 2008 prohibits the advance notice or notification to individuals by those employees who are participating in a covert test or evaluation. Further, the bill puts in place controls to monitor the testing personnel and the testing and evaluation procedures by building in accountability. It establishes the presence of a second team of covert test and evaluation employees with the first team in order to monitor and confirm their actions. Finally, the Act requires an impact study to evaluate covert testing and evaluation, and how it could be incorporated into other training and testing programs. The study and report will also provide an assessment on the test and evaluation results and recommendations for personnel training required to fulfill the Act.

"H. Res. 1150 is a straightforward resolution, but a very important one. Recognizing that TSA is the lead agency for transportation security, and all of the hard work Congress did last year to make rail and mass transit security programs more robust in the enactment of the 9/11 bill, we must continue to push TSA to fulfill the mandates for rail and mass transit security required by Congress. Last week, this subcommittee held a field hearing

in New York City on efforts to secure rail and mass transit. It was a truly edifying experience. We learned much about what is being done to secure the New York Transit system and other systems across the nation, and what TSA can do in its leadership role at the federal level, to facilitate these efforts. I want to commend TSA on its progress with the National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program, since most successful attacks on rail and mass transit are carried out using IEDs. However, we need TSA to continue to develop training programs for frontline workers, and fulfill the other mandates Congress put in place in the 9/11 bill to increase security on rail and mass transit.

"HR 4749 establishes the Office of Bombing Prevention within the Protective Security Coordination Division of the Office of Infrastructure Protection of the Department. The bill is a bi-partisan bill, whose lead sponsor is Ranking Member King and cosponsored by Chairman Thompson. The function of the Office of Bombing Prevention already exists in the Department, and this bill establishes it in statute. The Office is responsible for coordinating the Government efforts to deter, detect, prevent, protect against, and respond to terrorist explosive attacks in the United States. As we all know, the most likely terrorist threat to our nation's critical infrastructure and transportation modes is from explosives. We want to make sure that the Office of Bombing Prevention has the protection of being established by the force of law, so the Department can more readily meet the threats to our nation.

"Everyday millions of Americans travel across the country and abroad, by land, air, and sea. Fortunately, we have a process in place, the terrorist watch list or database, which makes travel safer for the traveling public. However, that very process has been plagued with problems and misidentifications. HR 4179, the Fair, Accurate, Secure and Timely (FAST) Redress Act of 2008, will establish an appeal and redress process to ensure that the Office of Appeals and Redress at the Department of Homeland Security becomes the "one-stop shop" that the American public deserves. The FAST Redress Act of 2008 will require that a comprehensive cleared list of individuals who have been misidentified and have corrected erroneous information be maintained by the Department and shared with those agencies that use the terrorist watch list or database. It will authorize the Secretary of the Department to enter into Memoranda of Understanding with other Federal agencies to enhance redress. The Act will protect the civil rights and civil liberties of American citizens and lawful permanent residents. Our citizens must not only be afforded an effective redress process, they must also be assured that once they have voluntarily provided personal information and successfully achieved redress, they are not repeatedly subjected to further misidentifications. This legislation is supported by the National Business Travel Association, who wrote to the committee in support of HR 4179. Without objection, I would like to submit this letter into the record. I believe the FAST Redress Act will make certain that there is a more streamlined and efficient redress process.

"I look forward to marking up these four very important bills with the cooperation of our colleagues from both sides of the aisle. It is often said in these forums but it is true-homeland security is a bi-partisan effort. Once again I thank you for your attention and participation."

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