

Oral Statement of

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Hearing  
“Eleven Years After 9/11: Can TSA Evolve To Meet the Next Terrorist Threat?”  
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Introduction

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, Members of the subcommittee, thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Sam Gilliland, and I serve as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sabre Holdings.

First and foremost, on the 11th anniversary of the horrible tragedy of September 11, we must pay tribute to all families who lost loved ones, friends and relatives. We must also honor those who assisted in the immediate aftermath, as well as all who helped get our country back on its feet economically. In their honor, and for the sake of the continued well-being of our nation, we must do all we can to protect ourselves from future attacks, while not deterring law-abiding, freedom-loving citizens from traveling.

This afternoon, I’m pleased to provide an update on the recommendations released last year by the U.S. Travel Association’s blue ribbon panel on aviation security.

Our panel set out to develop recommendations that would improve the TSA checkpoint, generate greater governmental efficiency and cooperation, and encourage broader use of risk management.

Overall, TSA has made significant progress. The risk based screening initiative implements one of the major goals of our panel and demonstrates a new willingness by the government to provide low risk travelers with an improved screening experience.

At the same time, there is much that remains undone.

Now, let me highlight some of the highest priority recommendations.

In our report, we called for a risk-based trusted traveler system. I’m pleased to say that TSA has made significant progress through the launch of the Pre✓™ program.

At the same time, there are millions of low risk travelers who could and should be enjoying expedited access through our nation’s airports. Pre✓™ must be expanded in several ways, including:

Facilitating interoperability among carriers;  
Increasing enrollment opportunities; and  
Offering Pre✓™ eligibility to international members of Global Entry.

Another recommendation focused on how travel industry stakeholders and TSA can collaborate so that travelers know what to expect at airport security. While the roll-out of both TSA Pre✓™ and the TSA smartphone app demonstrate progress in this area, travelers continue to be frustrated by the lack of clear instructions on screening protocols.

Our second set of recommendations was focused on improving government efficiency and cooperation. Our recommendation to reinstitute the Aviation Security Advisory Committee was implemented last November. I am also pleased that TSA named my friend and fellow witness Geoff Freeman as Chair of the ASAC Working Group on Passenger Advocacy.

Now, TSA needs to recognize the valuable perspective that passenger advocacy groups bring and include them in the full ASAC membership.

We also recommended that TSA develop a comprehensive, multi-year plan for acquiring and implementing checkpoint technology and that Congress provide multi-year funding authorization for the agency.

Unfortunately, TSA has yet to issue a legislatively required long term acquisition plan. We encourage them to do so soon. Also, collaboration with the technology development community remains uneven. This must change.

We also focused some of our recommendations on streamlining international arrivals. While DHS has taken no action on the duplicative TSA screening for international arrivals, the Fiscal Year 2012 DHS appropriations bill established a pilot program to look at this issue. Other legislative alternatives being considered, including the No Hassle Flying Act, H.R. 6028, are also consistent with the panel's recommendations.

In terms of facilitating international travel, we recommended that DHS expand trusted traveler programs and establish a multinational network of streamlined entry procedures for low-risk travelers. While CBP has expanded access to Global Entry and Congress has authorized the APEC Business Travel Card, more must be done. CBP should aggressively expand Global Entry, one of the finest government travel programs to ever be created, issue APEC Business Travel Cards and offer foreign members of Global Entry access to TSA Pre✓™.

Our final recommendation in the international area focused on cooperation. DHS has worked to build security screening capacity abroad, and in November of 2011 concluded negotiations with the European Union on a revised Passenger Name Record treaty. And recently, the U.S. and the European Union agreed to work together to harmonize the checkpoint screening of screening of liquids, aerosols and gels.

Going forward, DHS should continue expanding Global Entry, and Congress should pass legislation to add more countries to the Visa Waiver Program. In the liquids, aerosols and gels area, the U.S. and EU should make public their timelines and multi-year budgets for deployment of technology.

We also suggested that TSA restructure its risk management approach, and establish an outside experts group to help do so. While no such group has been convened, we are pleased with TSA's new, fresh look at risk management, embodied in the risk-based screening initiative.

In conclusion, since the issuance of the blue ribbon panel report – and clearly, since September 11, 2001 – much has been done to improve aviation security. At the same time, we are just beginning, as a nation, to look at the other side of TSA’s mission – travel facilitation. Many members of this committee are leading that effort, and we thank you for your commitment. The twin goals of security and facilitation must be effectively balanced to ensure that our country is both safe and prosperous.

In our estimation, TSA has made tremendous progress since its establishment, and recent efforts – including TSA’s risk based screening initiative – hold much promise.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.