



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Flight 253: Learning Lessons from an Averted Tragedy

January 27, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Flight 253: Learning Lessons from an Averted Tragedy”:

“Today’s hearing will examine the circumstances surrounding the attempted Christmas Day bombing of Northwest Flight 253. This Committee will examine what happened, why it happened and what this nation can do to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

We all know the facts. Abdulmatallab boarded Northwest Flight 253 in Amsterdam bound for Detroit. As the plane entered Detroit’s airspace, he removed chemicals concealed in his clothing and mixed them together with the intention of causing an explosion.

Thankfully, he failed. Courageous passengers and crew subdued and restrained him until the plane landed and he was taken into custody.

Since September 11, this nation has spent billions of dollars to fix the aviation security system. Yet, nine years later, it is clear that the safeguards put in place during the last Administration did not prevent another terrorist from boarding a plane and trying to bring harm to Americans.

This single failed terrorist act has brought those unsolved security vulnerabilities into sharp focus.

Security weaknesses in the process of gaining legal admission to this country; gaps in the collection and dissemination of information; a confusing plethora of lists used to identify dangerous individuals; stovepipes that impede the process of information analysis and sharing; and inconsistencies in the use of screening technology all combined to create the situation faced by the passengers on Flight 253.

The 9/11 Commission identified many of these problems. And while the previous Administration engaged in much movement to solve these problems, it appears that movement and progress are not the same.

Within two weeks of this incident, President Obama issued his preliminary report. The President’s report found “inherent systemic weaknesses and human errors” were the root cause of the intelligence failures that led to this incident. To any reasonable observer, one fact was certain: the system did not work. In fact, the President ordered a series of corrective actions.

A clear and unflinching assessment followed by quick action designed to address these long-known vulnerabilities must be commended.

But it is important for all of us to realize that we will not address our problems with terrorism in the blink of an eye or with a single technology. This nation must begin to adopt a layered approach to achieve a secure environment. We must not begin our security assessment at the airport gate.”

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