

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE REPORTS ON TSA SCREENING MODELS

June 9, 2011

What's at Issue

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure released a report on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) airport passenger security screening models. The report demonstrates that the private-federal screening option known as the Screening Partnership Program (SPP) is the most cost-effective screening model. The report further illustrates that the all-federal screening model is more costly and less efficient.

Why It's Important

The Aviation Transportation Security Act of 2001 (ATSA), which created the SPP, was signed into law following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The SPP was established to allow TSA-certified contractors, under federal supervision and regulation, to conduct passenger and baggage screening at airports. The law provided that airports could "opt-out" of all-federal screening and utilize private screening contractors. However, in January, TSA Administrator John Pistole made the decision not to allow airports to utilize the SPP, and denied the applications of Glacier Park International Airport (GPI), Yellowstone Airport (WYS), Missoula International Airport (MSO), Bert Mooney Airport (BTM) and Springfield Branson National Airport (SGF) to opt out of the federal screening model.

Major Finding

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure staff thoroughly investigated both the federal and SPP screening models by reviewing two of the largest airports in the country, San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). SFO utilizes the SPP model and is the largest U.S. airport in the program while LAX operates with all federal TSA screeners. The following are the major findings in the report:

- The federal government could save \$1 billion over five years if our nation's top 35 airports operated as efficiently as SFO under the SPP model.
- If LAX joined the SPP, the federal government would save \$38.6 million a year on federal salaries, recruitment and training costs. Total savings would exceed this amount

because overtime and injury rates were not considered due to TSA officials not releasing this information to committee staff.

- SPP screeners are 65% more efficient than federal security screeners.
- According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the TSA did not consider cost savings that would result from increased screener efficiencies when conducting a cost comparison of the SPP and federal models.
- Since its inception, the TSA has hired 137,000 staff and spent \$2 billion on recruiting and training costs. High attrition has resulted in the TSA spending too much time managing the federal screening program and has not provided enough resources to oversight and regulation of U.S. transportation security.
- The TSA's SPP application process needs to be evaluated. An airport operator is required to fill out an application for the SPP model and provide a one-sentence rationale for applying for the program.
- The TSA claimed they did not communicate with unions regarding SPP. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and TSA officials met with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the union urged the administration to review the SPP program and policies.
- The United States is the only country in the world that allows a government agency to operate as security personnel, administrator, regulator, and auditor at airports. Many international governments contract the role of airport security personnel to private screening companies, which allows those governments to focus on security standards, oversight and enforcement regulations. Private models such as the SPP are said to drive innovation, increase performance and lower costs.

Committee Recommendations

- The TSA Administrator should not have the discretion to deny any airport authority's SPP application. As the law states, every airport authority is entitled to opt out of the federal security screening model.
- The TSA should determine the criteria to pre-qualify private security companies to compete for SPP contracts.
- The SPP application process needs to be revised to require more significant information from airport authorities.
- The transition process from the federal screening model to the SPP model at airports should take less than one year instead of 24 months, as it does currently.

- The TSA should develop performance criteria for federal screeners and, if federal screeners fail to meet the standards, the airport should be immediately transitioned to the SPP model.

NATA Position

NATA is pleased with the committee report, which highlights the importance of ensuring that the private-federal screening model is preserved for the airports for which they choose to apply it. Federal cost savings and increased efficiencies are vital components to maintain security standards and safety at our nation's airports.

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