

THE TSA WORKFORCE CRISIS: A HOMELAND SECURITY RISK

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BEFORE THE
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TRANSPORTATION AND
MARITIME SECURITY
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THE TSA WORKFORCE CRISIS: A HOMELAND SECURITY RISK

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND MARITIME SECURITY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. J. Luis Correa [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Correa, Cleaver, Barragán, Demings, Thompson, Lesko, and Katko.

Mr. CORREA. Good morning, everyone. The Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security now comes to order. The committee is meeting today to receive testimony on the TSA Workforce Crisis, a Homeland Security Risk. I want to thank our Ranking Member, Mrs. Lesko, and our panel of witnesses who are joining us today.

In today's hearing, we will discuss the challenges facing TSA, the workforce, and how they impact TSA's National security mission. We are very aware of the threats facing our country and our transportation system. Terrorists, lone wolves, and other threat actors continue to target crowded airports, mass transit hubs, air carriers, with the ultimate goal of taking down one of our airplanes. TSA has no fail-safe mission. A single bomb or weapon slipping through our security could be used with devastating effects.

Transportation officers, or TSOs, work on the front line as our country's main defenders against these threats. Their jobs are extremely difficult, as they must work to look for a needle in a haystack in overstuffed bags, pat down passengers in very uncomfortable areas, detect fraudulent IDs, and keep pace with the evolving policies and technologies, all while serving as the face of Government to sometimes uncooperative passengers.

Ensuring that TSA hires, trains, retrain professional workers should be one of the Department of Homeland Security's top priorities. Unfortunately, the administration has placed supporting the TSA workforce on the back burner.

The President has prioritized the border wall above all other Homeland Security missions, threatening to undermine the security of the traveling public. Just recently, we learned that the administration is sending TSA employees, including TSOs, to the Southwest Border, just as the busy summer travel season is about

to begin. TSA's workforce is already stretched too thin, and can't afford such diversions.

TSA's morale is low, and its attrition is high. Last year, out of 410 Federal agency subcomponents surveyed, TSA came in 410th, or last, when it came to employee pay satisfaction. We can't do business that way. TSOs are among the lowest-paid workers in Government, and we saw during the recent shutdown that many of them live paycheck to paycheck. Let me repeat: TSOs are among the lowest-paid workers in Government, and during the most recent shutdown, many of them lived paycheck to paycheck.

TSOs also lack basic workforce rights and protections, such as full collective bargaining rights, and the ability to appeal disciplinary actions to an independent third party. This is no way to run a National security agency. TSA Administrator David Pekoske has attempted to address some of these challenges by creating a career progression plan for TSOs, but more must be done.

Unfortunately, in response to my question at our subcommittee's recent hearing last month, Administrator Pekoske refused to commit to continue working with TSA unions once the current collective bargaining agreement expires in December. Collective bargaining at TSA is already limited to scope and inadequate to meet the needs of the workforce. Refusing to advance even the status quo would amount to a counter-productive attack on labor.

I hope Administrator Pekoske will decide to continue to allow a unionized workforce. The TSA administration must recognize the need to address TSA's workforce challenges as TSA's attrition rate threatens to outpace its hiring rate. In 2016 and 2017, TSA hired more than 19,300 TSOs, yet lost more than 15,500 TSOs. If those numbers move slightly in the wrong direction, we could see a dwindling TSO workforce, even as passenger volume continues to increase.

Already, lines in front of TSA checkpoints snake through airport terminals, hindering airport operations, and creating security vulnerabilities. Airport security must be a priority.

I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the scope of problems facing TSA, and their recommendations you may have to address them. Let me say to all of our TSA workers, during the shutdown, you all showed up day after day without being paid. You kept our airlines, our planes, our passengers safe. Thank you very much.

[The statement of Chairman Correa follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA

MAY 21, 2019

Today's hearing will discuss the challenges facing the TSA workforce and how they impact TSA's National security mission. We are all well aware of the threats facing our Nation's transportation systems. Terrorists, lone wolves, and other threat actors continue to target crowded airports, mass transit hubs, and air carriers, with the ultimate goal of taking down a plane.

TSA has a no-fail mission. A single bomb or weapon slipping through security could be used to devastating effect. Transportation Security Officers, or TSOs, work on the front line as our country's main defenders against these threats. Their jobs are extremely difficult, as they must look for a needle in the haystack of overstuffed bags, pat down passengers in uncomfortable areas, detect fraudulent IDs, and keep pace with evolving policies and technologies—all while serving as the face of Government toward impatient and sometimes unruly passengers. We must ensure that

TSA hires, trains, and retains a professional workforce should be one of the Department of Homeland Security's top priorities.

Unfortunately, this administration has placed supporting the TSA workforce on the back burner. President Trump has prioritized a border wall above all other homeland security missions, threatening to undermine the security of the traveling public. Most recently, we learned last week that the administration is sending TSA employees, including TSOs, to the Southwest Border, just as the busy summer travel season is about to begin. TSA's workforce is already stretched too thin and cannot afford such diversions.

TSA's morale is low, and its attrition is high. Last year, out of 410 Federal agency subcomponents surveyed, TSA came in 410th place when it came to employee pay satisfaction—that is, last place. TSOs are among the lowest-paid workers in Government, and we saw during the recent shutdown that many of them live paycheck to paycheck. TSOs also lack basic workforce rights and protections, such as full collective bargaining rights and the ability to appeal disciplinary actions to an independent third party. This is no way to run a National security agency.

TSA Administrator David Pekoske has attempted to address some of these challenges by creating a career progression plan for TSOs, but more must be done. Unfortunately, in response to my questions at our subcommittee's budget hearing last month, Administrator Pekoske refused to commit to continue working with the TSA union once the current collective bargaining agreement expires this December. Collective bargaining at TSA is already limited in scope and inadequate to meet the needs of the workforce; refusing to advance even the status quo would amount to a counterproductive attack on labor. I hope Administrator Pekoske will decide to continue allowing a unionized workforce.

The administration must recognize the need to address TSA's workforce challenges, as TSA's attrition rate threatens to outpace its hiring rate. In 2016 and 2017, TSA hired more than 19,300 TSOs, yet lost more than 15,500 TSOs. If those numbers move just slightly in the wrong direction, we could see a dwindling TSO workforce—even as passenger volume continues to increase dramatically. Already, lines in front of TSA checkpoints snake through airport terminals, hindering airport operations and creating security vulnerabilities.

Airport security must be a priority. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the scope of the problems facing TSA and recommendations to address them.

Mr. CORREA. Now, I would like to recognize the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the gentlelady from Arizona, Mrs. Lesko, for an opening statement.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For those of you that don't know, today is the 100th anniversary of the date that the U.S. House of Representatives passed the 19th Amendment. Hence, we are all wearing the yellow roses to celebrate that.

Well, again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased that the subcommittee is holding this hearing today on important challenges facing the Transportation Security Administration workforce, who serve on the front lines protecting the traveling public from ever-present threats to transportation security. I thank TSA employees for their dedication to protecting our Nation and our people.

As identified in a recent report released by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General, TSA continues to struggle to provide consistent recruitment, retention, and training at Federalized airports across the United States, contributing to the agency's long-standing attrition and morale challenges.

TSA continues to struggle managing its front-line workforce who are so critical in protecting the public. The TSA workforce has a demanding job, and is truly the most important part of the agency. As America's economy continues to grow, unemployment has reached a 50-year low. Americans have more job options. Thus, a competitive labor market will only add additional challenges to TSA's efforts to retain personnel.

The agency must double-down on progress made toward improving career progression for front-line personnel and making TSA a better place to work. One possible solution, an alternative, is for more airports to consider participating in a screening partnership program, otherwise known as SPP. This program offers airports the opportunities to move from a Federalized to a privatized screener workforce that, while still overseen by TSA, is managed by private companies who may be better able to have flexibility for staffing needs.

Notably, during the month-long Government shutdown earlier this year, screeners at SPP airports continued to be paid, while Federal TSA screeners were not. Obviously, the shutdown was terrible, and I wish the TSA screeners would have been paid. I think I even cosponsored a bill to do so.

To be clear, Federal TSA screeners should not have been put in such a position as the Federal shutdown while Congress failed to fund the Government; however, airports who are concerned by workforce impacts stemming from Washington may wish to consider participation in SPP as a potential solution.

Some say that SPP takes us back to pre-9/11-style security, simply because the screeners are not Federal employees. I believe this is false and a misleading narrative, and it fails to take into account that SPP airports use the same equipment and same screening procedures as Federalized airports, and are overseen locally by TSA officials.

I am hopeful that Congress can work in a bipartisan manner to ensure the agency is nimble, but also effective and adequately staffed. TSA should take into account the results of a recently completed Blue Ribbon Commission panel on addressing workforce needs, which cautions against moving TSA personnel under Title V. Rather, this report recommends that TSA explore a wholesale rethinking of its pay scale structure and move even further away from a Title V model to exercise existing authorities and improved screener pay, performance, and morale.

Recently, over 100 TSA personnel, mostly from the Federal Air Marshal Service, volunteered in response to a DHS solicitation to help booster the efforts of Customs and Border Protection along our Southern Border. While the title of this hearing references a perceived crisis within the TSA workforce, I am mindful of the very real crisis facing DHS personnel along the border, and I am grateful to the service of TSA personnel who have volunteered to help their DHS colleagues in their vital Homeland Security mission.

This move underscores more than just the crisis at the border. It also underscores the dedication of our DHS men and women to their homeland security mission. That is why we here in Congress must act together to provide the necessary resources and oversight to ensure the TSA workforce is equipped for the challenges of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

I am looking forward to hearing from all the witnesses today. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.
[The statement of Ranking Member Lesko follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DEBBIE LESKO

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased that the subcommittee is holding this hearing today on important challenges facing the Transportation Security Administration workforce, who serve on the front lines protecting the traveling public from ever-present threats to transportation security. I thank TSA for their dedication protecting our Nation and people.

As identified in a recent report released by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General, TSA continues to struggle to provide consistent recruitment, retention, and training at Federalized airports across the United States, contributing to the agency's long-standing attrition and morale challenges. TSA continues to struggle managing its front-line workforce, who are so critical in protecting the public. The TSA workforce has a demanding job and is truly the most important part of the agency.

As America's economy continues to grow, unemployment has reached a 50-year low and Americans have more job options, thus a competitive labor market will only add additional challenges to TSA's efforts to retain personnel. The agency must double down on progress made toward improving career progression for front-line personnel and making TSA a better place to work.

One possible solution and alternative is for more airports to consider participating in the Screening Partnership Program, otherwise known as SPP. This program offers airports the opportunity to move from a Federalized to a privatized screener workforce that, while still overseen by TSA, is managed by private companies who may be better able to respond to staffing needs. Notably, during the month-long Government shut-down earlier this year, screeners at SPP airports continued to be paid, while Federal TSA screeners were not.

To be clear, Federal TSA screeners should not have been put in such a position while Congress failed to fund the Government; however, airports who are concerned by workforce impacts stemming from Washington may wish to consider participation in SPP as a potential solution. Some say that SPP takes us back to pre-9/11 style security simply because the screeners are not Federal employees. This false and misleading narrative fails to take into account that SPP airports use the same equipment and same screening procedures as Federalized airports and are overseen locally by TSA officials. I am hopeful that Congress can work in a bipartisan manner to ensure the agency is nimble, but also effective and adequately staffed.

TSA should take into account the results of a recently completed Blue Ribbon Commission panel on addressing workforce needs, which cautions against moving TSA personnel under Title 5. Rather, this report recommends that TSA explore a wholesale rethinking of its pay-scale structure and move even further away from a Title 5 model to exercise existing authorities and improve screener pay, performance, and morale.

Recently, over 100 TSA personnel, mostly from the Federal Air Marshal Service, volunteered in response to a DHS solicitation to help bolster the efforts of Customs and Border Protection along our Southern Border. While the title of this hearing references a perceived crisis within the TSA workforce, I am mindful of the very real crisis facing DHS personnel along the border and am grateful to the service of TSA personnel who have volunteered to help their DHS colleagues in their vital homeland security mission. This underscores more than just the crisis at the border—it also underscores the dedication of our DHS men and women to their homeland security mission.

That is why we here in Congress must act together to provide the necessary resources and oversight to ensure the TSA workforce is equipped for the challenges of today and the challenges of tomorrow. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. THOMPSON [presiding]. Thank you very much. I am sitting in the place of Mr. Correa, who has to go take a vote in Judiciary on a little small matter, but he will return. In the absence of the Chair, I will be here. I would also like to thank our witnesses.

I have a number of issues associated with this hearing, but I would like to say to our TSOs, I want to thank them very much for working under some of the trying conditions, like not getting paid that the Ranking Member talked about. The fact that somehow, we still can't get them put on the GSA schedule like most other Federal employees, and collective bargaining, which is clearly

something that is near and dear to employees who decide that they want representation.

So I am looking forward to the comments from our witnesses, as well as I am concerned about the OPM ratings that somehow put TSA at the bottom every year in terms of morale and other things. Some of us believe that there are some things that we could do as Congress to make things better. So I look forward to hearing the testimony.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MAY 21, 2019

TSA is essential to the Nation's homeland security enterprise. It could not do its critical work without its strongest asset: Its workforce. Transportation Security Officers, or TSOs, screen millions of passengers every day at airport checkpoints, while Federal Air Marshals, TSA Inspectors, and other TSA employees work behind the scenes to secure our aviation system. Unfortunately, TSA's workforce is not receiving the resources and support it needs to execute its mission successfully.

The Trump administration's budget requests for the past 3 years have been woefully inadequate in supporting the TSA workforce—to the point that the administration now is undermining TSA's ability to carry out its mission. Shockingly, this year's budget request proposed cutting the TSA workforce by 815 full-time employees from enacted levels, when staffing is already stretched thin. The administration has also failed to request the funding necessary to provide sorely needed salary increases for TSOs, some of whom have worked for years on end with few, if any, raises.

Today, we will hear from one of our witnesses about a report that found, under current practices, it would take an entry-level TSO 30 years to reach the top of the entry-level pay band. As a result of low salaries and insufficient raises, many TSOs live paycheck to paycheck. Earlier this year, we saw the debilitating impact the Government shutdown had on TSOs, as many officers experienced financial hardship due to missed paychecks that prevented them from providing for their families. The strain during the shutdown magnified pressures already facing TSOs, who are underpaid compared to most other Federal workers and vulnerable to low morale and high attrition. Unlike employees at most Federal agencies, TSOs do not receive regularly scheduled salary increases and lack basic workplace protections and rights. In 2018, according to employee surveys, TSA ranked dead last out of 410 Federal agency subcomponents on employee pay satisfaction. TSA Administrator Pekoske has acknowledged that better pay and increased staffing would result in lower attrition and better mission execution.

Even though the administrator is authorized to grant salary increases if funded, the agency has not fully addressed long-term concerns about the competitiveness of a TSO salary. Low pay, in combination with TSA's chronically low morale and limited benefits and workforce protections, have resulted in high attrition rates for TSOs. A recent DHS Office of Inspector General report confirmed that TSA could save millions of taxpayer dollars if TSA improved its hiring and retention practices for TSOs. TSA spends millions annually to hire thousands of TSOs, only to replace them with new TSOs soon after. Not only are its workforce challenges resulting in the loss of productivity, diminished expertise, and decreased employee morale—but TSA is wasting millions of taxpayer dollars and possibly putting our security at risk. This is unacceptable. I have introduced a bill, the Rights for Transportation Security Officers Act of 2019, to provide TSA front-line workers with the same rights and protections afforded to other Federal workers under Title 5 of the U.S. Code. This bill would set a path for increased pay and benefits for TSOs, providing access to the same basic personnel system used by most of the Federal Government. While we work toward building consensus in Congress, the administration must stop moving in the wrong direction.

Concerningly, Administrator Pekoske has not confirmed that he would allow for collective bargaining at TSA beyond December 2019. Collective bargaining is one of the few workforce protection and grievance mechanisms TSOs have under the current TSA personnel structure. The potential loss of such a right would only further drive down morale and hurt TSO staffing levels, even as passenger volume continues to increase Nation-wide. When TSA is short-staffed and not functioning effectively, airports can become crowded, crippled, and vulnerable to attacks. These are

risks that we simply cannot afford to take. That is why we have to explore solutions to address TSA's attrition problems and improve workforce protections for TSOs head-on. Addressing TSA's workforce challenges in a strategic manner will not only improve front-line workforce morale, but also advance aviation security in the face of evolving threats.

Mr. THOMPSON. I would like to welcome our panel of witnesses. Our first witness, Mr. John V. Kelly, joined the DHS Office of Inspector General in 2008, and was appointed Deputy Inspector General in June 2016.

Our next witness is Jay David Cox, he is national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, which is the largest union representing Federal employees in the District of Columbia. Mr. Cox was first elected AFGE president in August 2012, and was reelected to his third 3-year term in August 2018.

Lance Lyttle, our third witness, is the managing director of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport at the Port of Seattle. Prior to joining the Port, Mr. Lyttle was a chief operating officer of Houston's 3 airports, and an assistant general manager at Hartsfield-Jackson in Atlanta.

Our fourth witness, Mr. Jeffrey Neal, has served as senior vice president at International—ICF International since 2011. Mr. Neal previously served as chief Human Capital officer at DHS and chief Human Capital officer at the Defense Logistics Agency. Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record. I now ask each witness to summarize his or her statement for 5 minutes, beginning with Mr. Kelly.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN V. KELLY, ACTING INSPECTOR
GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. KELLY. Chairman Thompson, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss TSA's challenges with its transportation security officer workforce. At the end of fiscal year 2017, TSA had about 61,000 employees, more than half of which are entry-level security officers.

TSA relies on security officers to safeguard the traveling public by identifying prohibited items, and preventing those items from getting on aircraft. We previously reported, in our covert testing and other reports, on the importance of security officers. We believe security officers' retention and training challenges contribute to airport security weaknesses. Human performance and sound judgment are critical factors in protecting against terrorists.

Hiring, training, and retaining a qualified workforce is critical to secure our airports. Our auto report identified 3 basic problems: First, TSA does not always ensure it hires the most qualified security officers. While TSA tests applicants, TSA could enhance its testing by including personality and practice tests to determine whether or not an applicant is suitable for their job.

TSA could also improve security officers, the interview process, by allowing interviewers to exclude an applicant if they believe the applicant is not a good fit, and also including questions that assess an applicant's ability to perform the security officer's duties.

Second, training deficiencies may lead to security risks. If new or inexperienced security officers are not adequately trained, air travelers' safety can be put at risk. Before we initiated our most recent

audit, TSA did not have a standardized approach to train new security officers. This can cause a significant problem, because TSA does not immediately send security officers to basic training.

TSA exacerbated this problem by not giving all airport training managers visibility into the basic training curriculum. The third problem is, TSA does not use all resources to retain security officers. TSA reports its attrition rate is roughly the Government average of about 17 percent. However, TSA's voluntary attrition rate of 14 percent exceeds the Government's voluntary attrition rate of 11 percent. Further, a large portion of security officers are part-time employees who have a 26 percent attrition rate. This inability to retain security officers has a financial and security impact.

In fiscal year 2017, TSA spent \$75 million to hire and train over 9,000 new security officers, roughly 20 percent of which left within 6 months of being hired. TSA is plagued with high attrition across all airport sizes. However, smaller airports have the highest attrition rates. This is acutely dangerous because small airports may have only a handful of security officers. Consequently, their loss is more difficult to manage.

Security officers at small airports leave because of limited career growth opportunities, and scheduling challenges. TSA has taken some actions to retain security officers, but it has not used all available resources. For example, TSA airport officials do not consistently conduct exit interviews, and when they do conduct exit interviews, it does not always share the results with airport officials.

In addition, low pay has an impact on TSA's ability to retain security officers. Some airports have difficulty competing with local employers. Federal data shows that at hard-to-hire airports, TSA pays security officers 30 percent below the local per capita income. Improving retention efforts could improve security and save taxpayer dollars.

In summary, given the security officer's integral role in ensuring the Nation's aviation system security, TSA must hire highly-qualified applicants who are well-trained and motivated to remain for a long-term career. By improving hiring and retention policies, TSA can maintain a fully capable and experienced security officer workforce and realize cost savings.

I am happy to report that TSA concurred with all 9 recommendations, and has taken steps to implement some of those recommendations. Actually, we have closed 3 of those. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer questions you or Members of the subcommittee may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kelly follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN V. KELLY

MAY 21, 2019

WHY WE DID THIS AUDIT

TSOs are integral to improving aviation security at our Nation's airports by identifying prohibited objects in bags, in cargo, and on passengers. Therefore, TSA must retain, hire, and train its TSOs with the requisite skills and abilities to help protect the Nation from aviation security risks. We conducted this audit to determine the extent to which TSA retains, hires, and trains TSOs to accomplish its screening mission.

What We Recommend

We made 9 recommendations that, when implemented, should help TSA improve TSO retention, hiring, and training.

WHAT WE FOUND

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) needs to continue to improve its retention, hiring, and training of Transportation Security Officers (TSOs). Specifically, TSA needs to better address its retention challenges because it currently does not share and leverage results of TSO exit surveys and does not always convey job expectations to new hires. Prior to August 2018, TSA did not always focus on TSO career growth. Thus, the agency may be missing opportunities to prevent early attrition. By improving its retention efforts, TSA could save funds otherwise spent to hire and train new TSOs.

Furthermore, TSA does not fully evaluate applicants for capability as well as compatibility when hiring new TSOs. Thus, the agency may be making uninformed hiring decisions due to inadequate applicant information and a lack of formally-documented guidance on ranking potential new hires. Without complete information, TSA may not be selecting the most highly-qualified individuals as TSOs.

Prior to July 2018, TSA had not standardized the approach for training new TSOs before they attend basic training and did not consistently send TSOs to basic training immediately following on-boarding. TSA also does not give all airports complete visibility into its basic training curriculum as a basis for training new hires locally. Without an experienced workforce or a consistent, robust training program, TSA is missing opportunities to strengthen its workforce. Given the importance of TSOs fulfilling the aviation security mission, TSA must address its retention, hiring, and training challenges, which could save millions in taxpayers' dollars.

TSA RESPONSE

TSA concurred with all 9 recommendations and initiated corrective actions to address the findings.

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me today to discuss the recent work of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (OIG) related to the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Transportation Security Officer (TSO) workforce. In my testimony today, I am pleased to share the results of our office's recent work, in which we identified challenges facing TSA in retaining, hiring, and training its TSOs.¹

TSA's mission is to protect our Nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce. A professional, motivated, and dedicated workforce is vital to mission success. At the end of fiscal year 2017, TSA had about 61,400 employees, of which more than 34,200 (56 percent) were entry-level TSOs. TSA relies on TSOs to ensure the safety of air travelers by identifying prohibited objects in bags, in cargo, and on passengers to prevent those objects from getting onto aircraft—a difficult and complex job. Therefore, hindrances to TSA's ability to hire qualified applicants and retain experienced staff who are adequately trained has both financial and security-related implications. History shows terrorists are capable of attacking in many different ways. As threats change, TSA pursues advanced technology for detection. This requires that TSOs learn and operate new equipment with revised procedures to safeguard the traveling public. Failure to address and overcome these challenges could affect the overall safety of air travelers and the entire aviation transportation system.

In our report, we noted that TSA² has difficulty retaining TSOs because it does not share and leverage results of TSO exit surveys and does not always convey job expectations to new hires. As a result, TSA may be missing opportunities to prevent early attrition. By improving its retention efforts, TSA could save funds otherwise spent to hire and train new TSOs. We also reported that, when hiring new TSOs, TSA does not fully evaluate applicants' capability and compatibility. The resultant inadequate applicant information combined with a lack of formally documented guidance for ranking potential new hires may lead to uninformed hiring decisions. Without complete information, TSA may also not be selecting the most highly-qualified individuals. Finally, although TSA now has a standardized approach to training new TSOs, we reported that, prior to July 2018, TSA did not have such an approach

¹ *TSA Needs to Improve Efforts to Retain, Hire, and Train its Transportation Security Officers*, OIG-19-35 (March 2019).

² Our scope focused on Federalized airports, not the privatized airports, also referred to as the Screening Partnership Program (SPP).

and did not consistently send TSOs to basic training immediately after on-boarding. Our audit also showed that TSA was not giving all airports visibility into its basic training curriculum for them to use as a basis to train newly-hired TSOs locally. The lack of consistent, robust training program means TSA is missing opportunities to strengthen its workforce and create a cadre of experienced TSOs. I am pleased to report that TSA concurred with all 9 of our recommendations and began taking actions to implement them, which are detailed later in this testimony.

In many of our previous reports stemming from covert testing and other audits related to TSO performance and training, we identified issues at TSA that diminish its ability to retain personnel and lead to high employee turnover. These issues include low workforce morale, staffing and scheduling challenges, inadequate management of employees, high attrition rates, and relatively low pay for TSOs. In response to the recommendations in our previous reports,³ TSA has taken steps to address these issues, but as we recently reported, some challenges persist.

TRAINING DEFICIENCIES MAY LEAD TO SECURITY RISKS

As threats change, TSA pursues advanced detection technology, which requires TSOs to learn revised procedures and operate new equipment to safeguard the traveling public. If new, inexperienced TSOs are not adequately and consistently trained, air travelers' safety can be put at risk. In our recent report, we found that TSA lacked a standard approach to training prior to TSO attendance at Basic Training Program (BTP), which it has sought to correct. We also determined that airport training managers did not have visibility into the TSO basic training curriculum.

Before July 2018, TSA did not have a standardized approach for training new TSOs before they attended the BTP and did not consistently send TSOs to basic training immediately following on-boarding. TSA did take steps to rectify these issues by standardizing its approach.

Although TSA has standardized its training approach, personnel in TSA's Training and Development office did not give all airport training managers complete visibility into the TSO BTP curriculum so they could use it as a basis to train newly-hired TSOs. At the time of our audit, at least 5 of the 12 airports we visited were not able to access the TSO BTP curriculum. Without knowing the content of the BTP curriculum, airport training managers would not be able to improve TSO skills and performance with appropriate local training.

TSA DOES NOT USE ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO RETAIN TSO S

TSA's inability to retain TSOs and reduce turnover has a financial impact. During fiscal years 2016–2017, TSA hired more than 19,300 TSOs to address vacancies and anticipated attrition, but during the same period lost more than 15,500. Every year, TSA spends millions of dollars to hire and train new TSOs to replace those who leave. In fiscal year 2017, TSA obligated about \$3.5 billion for TSO screening operations, which was about 41 percent of TSA's funding.⁴ The \$3.5 billion included costs for screening personnel, compensation, benefits, and training. During the same year, TSA hired more than 9,600 TSOs, costing the component approximately \$75 million in hiring and training costs.

TSA continues to struggle with attrition across all sizes of airports. For example, the 3 largest category airports, representing 92 percent of the TSO workforce, have an attrition rate of approximately 17 percent. The smallest categories of airports, representing 8 percent of the TSO workforce, have an attrition rate of approximately 19 percent. A large portion of the newly-hired TSO officer workforce were part-time employees who had a 26 percent attrition rate. Smaller airports may only have 4 TSO positions, whereas larger airports may have more than 1,000 TSO positions. According to TSA airport officials, TSOs at smaller airports may leave due to limited career growth opportunities and scheduling challenges. TSA has identified some challenges to retaining TSOs and has taken actions to address them, for example, by offering retention incentives in some cities. However, the component has not yet used all available resources to retain TSOs and reduce turnover.

First, TSA does not fully utilize TSO exit surveys and the data collected in TSO exit surveys to determine how to enhance the TSO work experience. In addition,

³The reports include: *Covert Testing of TSA's Screening Checkpoint Effectiveness* OIG–17–112, September 2017, and *TSA's Management of Its Screening Workforce Training Program Can Be Improved* OIG–11–05, October 2010.

⁴Fiscal year 2017 TSA obligational authority was \$8.4 billion, which does not include \$2.8 billion for aviation security and credentialing fees collected. According to a TSA official, obligational authority is the authority provided by law to incur financial obligations that will result in outlays.

TSA airport officials do not consistently conduct exit interviews when TSOs leave. As TSOs depart, officials may collect limited information, but it is not always used to address weaknesses that may be contributing to TSO turnover.

At the time of our audit, TSA's Human Capital office analyzed the results of exit surveys for common themes and presented the information to TSA senior officials, but it did not share survey results with airport management for more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, TSA did not fully analyze survey responses, especially from high-turnover employees, such as part-time personnel and those with less than 6 months' experience.

Our review of TSA exit survey results from more than 10,000 respondents from fiscal years 2012–2017 showed common themes, most of which TSA airport official corroborated during our interviews. These common themes included dissatisfaction with career advancement opportunities and issues with management's competence and communication. The most common responses identified in these exit surveys related to dissatisfaction with the TSO role, including career advancement, management, scheduling, and pay.

Second, according to TSA airport officials we interviewed, some TSOs leave shortly after starting because they do not fully understand scheduling demands or the daily tasks of the job, such as the details of pat-down procedures. We found that TSA had available, but did not require airports to use, means of communicating job expectations to applicants. Such means include a Realistic Job Preview video and an optional conversation prior to scheduling the Airport Assessment or prior to check-in on the day of the Airport Assessment.

Third, TSA did not consistently focus on career development opportunities for TSOs to promote interest and long-term loyalty. At some airports we visited, we obtained an understanding of best practices related to career development such as promotions and the opportunity to take roles outside of screening operations. At 6 of 12 airports visited, TSA airport officials agreed that lack of career advancement affected TSO attrition. TSA has taken steps to address this issue. In August 2018, TSA implemented the first phase of TSO Career Progression, which provides newly-hired entry-level officers a career path with pay increases tied to enhanced skills and training. Under TSO Career Progression, newly-hired TSOs must successfully complete standardized training locally and then attend training at the TSA Academy within a certain period of on-boarding.

Fourth, staffing shortages affect retention. TSA officials reported they were short-staffed because not enough applicants were in the hiring pipeline. TSA officials from one airport we visited expressed concerns about staffing according to the airport's Resource Allocation Plan.⁵ In the second quarter of fiscal year 2018, the airport was staffed at 87 percent. An official at the same airport said that even though TSA offers overtime shifts to fill scheduling gaps resulting from staff shortages, the airport has difficulty filling those overtime shifts. In our opinion, excessive use of overtime, which could be mitigated by competitive salaries and adequate staffing levels, could also result in lower job satisfaction and morale, and therefore higher turnover.

Finally, low pay has an impact on TSA's ability to retain TSOs. During our audit, airport hiring personnel said they had difficulty competing with local economic conditions. Exit surveys cited pay as one of the most common reasons employees leave TSA. According to a 2014 TSA memo, front-line TSOs were the lowest-paid operational personnel in TSA's workforce. TSO pay is limited to the TSA pay bands allotted for the position. Officials from 2 hard-to-hire airports said TSOs often leave to find job opportunities that offer the same or higher pay. When comparing the most recent Census Bureau data for cities in which these 2 hard-to-hire airports are located, TSA pays TSOs as much as 31 percent below the per capita income amount.

By improving its retention efforts, TSA could save millions of taxpayer dollars spent hiring and training new TSOs. Attrition costs include the costs of replacing those who leave by hiring and training new staff, as well as losses associated with productivity, institutional knowledge, decreased employee morale, and potential performance gaps as new staff take time to learn to fully perform in their job.

TSA HAS NOT FULLY PURSUED ALL OPTIONS TO ENSURE IT HIRES QUALIFIED TSO S

TSA has not pursued all options for fully evaluating applicants to ensure it hires qualified staff. For example, TSA could enhance its current competency tests. Dur-

⁵ Security Operations provides a Resource Allocation Plan to each airport based upon data, such as passenger volume and targeted wait times. This plan estimates the number of full-time equivalents necessary to meet these demands.

ing the Computer-Based Test (CBT)⁶ and interview, TSA assesses competencies, such as oral communication, attention to detail, conflict management, critical thinking, flexibility, integrity, honesty, teamwork, and situational awareness. TSA could potentially enhance the CBT by including personality tests and practice tests given at colleges to determine fitness for TSO positions. Additionally, TSA could enhance its structured interview, which consists of 7 competencies validated as critical for the position, including flexibility, teamwork, and oral communication. According to TSA personnel at one airport, the interview portion limits their ability to disqualify applicants because interviewer has to follow scripts during the interview and have little latitude on what they can tell the candidate. The interviewer does not have the ability to say the candidate is not a good fit, for example, if he arrives late and is dressed inappropriately. TSA personnel at another airport said the interview questions do not assess the ability to perform actual TSO duties.

The TSA Human Capital office has started an initiative to develop and implement a valid assessment to strengthen the TSO applicant pool by identifying applicants least and most likely to be a good fit for the position. In April 2018, TSA officials completed research on the potential effectiveness of assessing job compatibility during the hiring process. TSA officials said the job compatibility assessment is a pre-employment suitability screening that focuses on personality-related, motivational, and attitudinal competencies that are critical for job performance. The Human Capital office plans to complete this initiative and incorporate the assessment into the hiring process in the fall of 2019. Additional enhancements to improve the evaluation process include personality tests, practice tests, and asking structured interviews to better evaluate an applicant's ability to perform TSO duties.

TSA also lacks supporting documentation for applicants. Airports could not provide documentation showing applicants passed all steps in the hiring process. Without these documents, TSA could not verify these applicants met the qualifications to be eligible for job offers. Additionally, TSA lacked formal criteria and clear guidance describing the Certification List⁷ ranking process used by the TSO Cert Tool.⁸ Without this evidence, we could not verify whether TSA programmed its TSO Cert Tool correctly. As a result, TSA airport personnel may not be contacting and extending job offers to the most qualified applicants.

CONCLUSION

We have previously reported many findings and recommendations in prior Department of Homeland Security OIG covert testing and other audit reports specific to TSO performance and training. TSA continues to work on improving its workforce's capability to address security risks and vulnerabilities. We believe TSO retention and training challenges are contributing factors to airport security weaknesses. Human performance and sound judgment are critical factors in protecting the Nation against terrorist attacks, thus highlighting the importance of retaining experienced TSOs, hiring qualified TSOs, and training the workforce appropriately to secure our airports.

Given TSO's integral role in ensuring the Nation's aviation system security, including the safety of millions of air travelers, TSA must hire highly-qualified applicants who are comprehensively trained and motivated to remain in their positions long-term. In our report, we identified challenges to achieving these goals. By addressing and overcoming these challenges, TSA will be able to maintain a fully capable and experienced TSO workforce and realize cost savings while effectively accomplishing its vital mission.

As a result of our audit we made 9 recommendations to TSA aimed at improving retention, hiring, and training of TSOs. I am happy to report that TSA concurred with all 9 of our recommendations and has taken steps to implement them. Specifically, we closed 3 recommendations because TSA implemented the first phase of TSO Career Progression, sent a message to airports reminding them to follow TSA records retention policies, and is enforcing the pre-Basic Training Program training requirements. Based on information we received recently from TSA, we are working to close a fourth recommendation to give all airports access to the entire Basic Training Program curriculum. Four additional recommendations are resolved, but

⁶The CBT comprises a Screener English Test and a Screener Object Recognition Test.

⁷The Certification List is a list of eligible applicants used to select individuals for employment. TSA selecting officials at the airports make job offers to applicants in the order in which they appear on the Certification Lists ranking from best qualified, highly qualified, and qualified.

⁸The TSO Cert Tool uses a numeric score for each applicant derived from the Screener Object Recognition Test portion of the CBT and airport interview to rank applicants into qualified categories on a Certification List.

open pending receipt of further information from TSA. These are recommendations to improve the TSO hiring process, revise the exit survey process, examine pay increases based on TSO skill level, and document system functional requirements, such as the rating process criteria. Finally, our recommendation to TSA to review and develop recruitment and retention strategies to continue to review for reducing attrition at smaller airports; and among part-time TSOs is unresolved because we do not agree with TSA's proposed corrective action plan. The actions TSA described during the recruitment process in their response to the recommendation do not specifically address the intent of the recommendation.

Below is a summary of our recommendations, as well as TSA's corrective actions.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND TSA CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

1. We recommended that TSA improve the hiring process to ensure applicants are informed of TSO duties and that TSA continue to hire qualified applicants. In response, TSA said it would mandate that personnel scheduling the Airport Assessment review an airport's hours of operations, typical shifts and days off, and typical duties of the position. Applicants will be required to watch the TSO Realistic Job Preview. TSA plans to include a compatibility assessment tool in the TSO hiring process by September 30, 2019. (Recommendation is resolved and open.)

2. We recommended that TSA revise the exit survey process to ensure airports offer local exit interviews, record results in a centralized system, provide access to the results, and address areas identified in the results that would help retain a skilled and knowledgeable TSO workforce. In Fall 2018, TSA released a new Workforce Surveys iShare site, which includes a page dedicated to the National Exit Survey. All TSA employees have access to this page and are able to view survey information and TSA-wide results and can run custom reports. Employees can also use the iShare site to access action planning tools and best practices. As needed, TSA will engage with airports to facilitate local action planning focus groups. Additionally, TSA will randomly evaluate these efforts. The estimated completion date is September 30, 2019. To ensure airports offer local exit interviews, the Human Capital office and Security Operations will broadcast a message to airport leadership reminding them of this requirement. The estimated completion date is April 30, 2019. (Recommendation is resolved and open.)

3. We recommended that TSA continue to review and develop recruitment and retention strategies for reducing attrition at smaller airports and among part-time TSOs. TSA planned to implement its TSO Career Progression, announced in August 2018. TSA also said it uses retention incentives to augment TSO pay at duty stations with retention and recruitment challenges and, during the recruitment process, markets the benefits of Federal employment and promotes TSO positions as an entry point to a Federal career. TSA has also implemented additional recruitment strategies and approaches, such as sponsored social media and digital advertising. OIG responded that TSO Career Progression and retention incentives may help retain TSOs, but recruitment process actions described do not specifically address the intent of the recommendation. This recommendation remains unresolved and open because we did not agree with TSA's proposed corrective action plan.

TSA responded with a variety of overall recruitment and retention strategies such as marketing on social media, implementation of TSO Career Progression, use of retention incentives to augment TSO pay at duty stations with retention and recruitment challenges, and marketing the benefits of Federal employment to prospective applicants. We recognize that TSO Career Progression, implemented in August 2018, and retention incentives may assist with retention of officers, including those who are part-time or located at smaller airports. However, actions described during the recruitment process do not specifically address the intent of the recommendation.

4. We recommended that TSA meet established time lines to implement the first phase of TSO Career Progression for newly-appointed entry-level TSOs. TSA implemented the first phase of TSO Career Progression on August 5, 2018 for TSOs hired on or after that date. (Recommendation is closed.)

5. We recommended that TSA examine pay increases based TSO skill level to help attract and retain a strong workforce. TSA explained that TSO Career Progression, implemented in August 2018, is a strategic and comprehensive approach establishing a clearly-defined and transparent career path for employees, with pay increases tied to enhanced skills and training for the TSA front-line workforce. TSA also completed an officer compensation analysis, the results

of which TSA will use to consider changes to the existing TSO pay structure. The estimated completion date is June 30, 2019. (Recommendation is resolved and open.)

6. We recommended that TSA remind airports to follow TSA records retention policies for Airport Assessment documentation. On October 2, 2018, TSA sent a message to airport hiring points of contact. (Recommendation is closed.)

7. We recommended that TSA formally document system functional requirements, such as the rating process criteria, to ensure proper system logic in ranking applicants on Certification Lists. TSA will create a comprehensive Systems Functional Requirements Document for any new systems and update it to include rating process criteria in the TSO Cert Tool. The estimated completion date is September 30, 2019. (Recommendation is resolved and open.)

8. We recommended that TSA enforce the pre-Basic Training Program training requirements. As of August 2018, all TSOs hired receive the same standardized local training prior to attending a second phase of training at FLETC. Prior to attending FLETC, TSOs complete an Academy-ready checklist, which the airport maintains. This checklist ensures training completion. (Recommendation is closed.)

9. We recommended that TSA give all airports access to the entire Basic Training Program curriculum. (TSA recently provided an update. We are working to close this recommendation.)

We will continue to approach our work with dedication and urgency and will keep Congress fully informed of our findings and recommendations, consistent with our obligations under the Inspector General Act of 1978.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you or other Members of the subcommittee may have.

Thank you.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you for your testimony. I now recognize Mr. Cox to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF J. DAVID COX, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Mr. COX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member, and the Members of the committee. A special thanks to you, Chairman Thompson, for introducing H.R. 1140, the bill to provide Title V protections to the TSO workforce. I ask each Member here today to co-sponsor this important legislation.

The best way to describe the status of the transportation security officer workforce separate and unequal, unlike their colleagues and the rest of DHS, and unlike their colleagues and the rest of TSA itself, TSOs are excluded from the due process rights, the collective bargaining rights, the pay system, and other personnel rules under Title V.

From its inception, TSA implemented two different personnel systems: One for TSOs, and one for the rest of the TSA workforce based on the FAA personnel system that applies most of Title V. As time passes, memory fades. Too many people forget that the 9/11 terrorists exploited our weak first line of defense, airport security screening.

TSA management comes very close to reproducing the pre-9/11 conditions for airport security screeners. That is why the need for change is so urgent. There are two categories of change that need to be addressed: Pay and labor rights. Average starting salaries are too low, just \$35,000 per year, less than \$17 an hour. During the first 2 years, a long period of so-called probation, they are stuck. The rewards for top performance are pitifully small.

Last year, the 2 highest performance ratings, 4 and 5, awarded according to ever-changing criteria, earned you only a 1 percent salary bump, or else a bonus that didn't go into your base. If the

performance rating was a 3, described as achieving expectations, you get nothing. Do I have to tell you what impact this has on employee morale? Yes. These are the loyal TSOs that came to work through the 35-day shutdown, and this is the way TSA pay system treats them.

TSA makes and breaks its own rules of employment for TSOs. It reinvents its pay standards every year. Airport checkpoints are effectively the fiefdoms of individual TSA managers, so much so that there is little consistency between checkpoints, let alone airports. Last year, TSA modified its table of penalties in a way that fundamentally misunderstands the very concept of progressive discipline.

Progressive discipline is supposed to increase penalties for a particular type of misconduct. But in TSA, one tardy is a Strike 1. An unrelated uniform violation is Strike 2, and gets a TSO more serious disciplinary action that can lead to termination.

Each disciplinary action stays in a personnel file for at least 2 years. The penalty for this is no transfer to another airport, and disqualification from career progression, and disqualifies a TSO from eligibility for that 1 percent performance raise, or the bonus pay to trainers. When little things have such harsh consequences, and when perfections have such small rewards, it is clear that the system is in need of a change.

A single disciplinary action stalls a TSO's career for at least 2 long years. Of course, TSOs have almost no stability to clear the records because they lack a real grievance and arbitration process in their collective bargaining agreement. They have no recourse to the MSPB. The administrator has not yet committed to another round of collective bargaining when the current contract expires. Please be aware that the only progress that has been made in the area of labor relations at TSA has come at the bargaining table. TSA should not have the discretion under the law to refuse to bargain. That is another reason TSOs need coverage under Title V.

So for all these reasons, we ask for legislation that grants TSOs full coverage under Title V, full first class status under the law, full rights, and a fair pay system that other employees of TSA, DHS, and the rest of the Federal Government have. This concludes my statement, and I will be glad to take questions at the end, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cox follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF J. DAVID COX, SR.

MAY 21, 2019

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, Committee Chairman Thompson, and Members of the Homeland Security Committee, I am J. David Cox, and I am the national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE). On behalf of over 700,000 Federal workers represented by our union, including over 44,000 Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony at today's hearing before the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security of the Committee on Homeland Security, "The TSA Workforce Crisis: A Homeland Security Risk." The title of this hearing is accurate: The performance of the TSO workforce remains at a high level and their diligence continues to keep the flying public safe—even as they worked without pay for 35 days as hostages during a Presidential game of "chicken" with Congress. In addition, TSOs encounter an almost hostile attitude from many in TSA management. Our union knows that rights under title 5 of the U.S. Code which would ensure TSOs the same fair pay, union rights, and respectful treatment as other Federal

workers are directly tied to the ability of the workforce provide the highest level of aviation security.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle who stood with TSOs and the colleagues at other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components, and the Departments of the Interior, Labor, Agriculture, and Justice during the shutdown. Members of Congress publicized the hardship and undue burden placed on Government workers during the shutdown, including essential employees of DHS components who worked without pay. The food pantries arranged by Representatives and Senators provided necessities to TSOs and their families. AFGE is also deeply appreciative of legislation filed to ensure furloughed and essential employees received full backpay, were eligible for unemployment compensation, and would have clearances and credit reports protected. Out of a situation created by the Government at its worst, Federal workers also experienced Government at its best.

TSOs' lack of statutory rights is rooted in a combination of two things: First, a desire by the Government to provide aviation security on the cheap; and second, a pernicious belief that worker rights are somehow contrary to homeland security. TSA apparently bases its personnel policies on both notions even though each is demonstrably false, and each has made it more difficult for the agency to provide security to the flying public. Above all else, TSA desperately clings to its authority under § 111(d) of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) (Pub. L. 107-71).

The footnote reads as follows:

"Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Under Secretary of Transportation for Security may employ, appoint, discipline, terminate, and fix the compensation, terms, and conditions of employment of Federal Service for such a number of individuals as the Under Secretary determines to be necessary to carry out the screening functions of the Under Secretary under Section 44901 of Title 49, United States Code, (49 U.S.C. § 44935 Note)."

The footnote has been interpreted by courts and administrative proceedings as granting TSA almost unreviewable authority over TSO employment rights. AFGE was the first union to file judicial challenges to this interpretation beginning in 2003, and we continue to do so in 2019. Congress has never before or since granted any other agency head this level of authority over a group of employees, and for good reason.

In the past, I submitted testimony to Congress describing TSA working conditions as "separate and unequal." TSA implemented two personnel systems: One created solely for TSOs and one for all other TSA employees, managers included, based largely on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) personnel system that applies most of Title 5 of the U.S. Code. Over 44,000 TSOs are denied the ability to appeal adverse personnel decisions to an objective, outside body like the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) or through negotiated grievance procedures. However, like most Federal workers, TSA managers can appeal adverse personnel decisions (including removals) not only to the MSPB but to the U.S. Court of Appeals. TSOs are subject to a cumulative disciplinary system unlike the progressive disciplinary system applied across other Federal agencies, including other DHS components. For too long, the TSO workforce has performed their jobs effectively, efficiently, and with a professional demeanor, all the while under duress largely at the hands of TSA management.

Two recent events rightfully drew the attention of lawmakers and the public to the detrimental situation of the TSO workforce: The disproportionately severe impact of the 2018-2019 Government shutdown, and documentation that TSA's personnel policies are directly linked to TSO retention as set forth in the March 29, 2019 DHS Office of Inspector General Report (OIG), *TSA Needs to Improve Efforts to Hire, Retain, and Train Its Transportation Security Officers*. The Government shutdown focused attention on the commitment of TSOs to remain on the job on the front lines of aviation security for over 1 month without pay. The DHS OIG report supported AFGE's position that TSA's personnel policies make it harder for the agencies to hire new TSOs and retain TSOs. These policies also make it harder for TSOs stay on the job and apply their experience, and that is harmful to security. Both the shutdown and TSA personnel policies are a bitter pill for the TSO workforce to swallow.

PARTIAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Late December 2018, TSOs received their last full paycheck and they did not receive another full paycheck until the second week of February 2019. When the money from their December 31st paychecks ran out, TSA advised TSOs to "barter"

for goods and services and to “work off” debts to creditors because the agency made it difficult for TSOs to take a second job. TSA initially told TSOs it was a violation of agency rules to accept gas or grocery cards from anyone—including their union, AFGE. TSA only approved food distributions at airports after media reports of TSOs and their families utilizing food banks and filing for SNAP benefits. Despite media reports, AFGE was never aware of any organized TSO callouts to protest the shutdown. We were fully aware that toward the end of the shutdown TSOs lacked the funds to fill their gas tanks or pay for mass transit.

The shutdown might be over for the public and the Executive and Legislative branches, but the impacts continue for the TSO workforce. Not all TSOs received back pay in a timely manner. Not all creditors were willing to work with Federal workers who missed payments during the 35-day shutdown. We know TSOs burned through sick leave when they were unable to pay for child care or afford the commute to work. The long-lasting effects of the shutdown continue to have a direct effect on TSOs’ personal finances, as well as workplace morale.

TSA PERSONNEL POLICIES

TSA’s application of its authority of the ATSA footnote has created a personnel system that repeatedly leads to dismal workplace satisfaction rankings. We know from the results of the most recent “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government” survey that TSA employees failed to rank the agency above the lowest quartile (25 percent) in any category with the exception of training. In addition to TSA coming in dead last on satisfaction with pay, TSA employees provided remarkably low scores on the fairness of leadership, matching employee skills to the mission, performance-based rewards and advancement, and teamwork and innovation. The low marks of this survey correlate with concerns AFGE has raised for the past 17 years.

PAY

I began this testimony by noting that TSA cannot provide aviation security on the cheap. Because TSA has abused its authority under the ATSA footnote to short-change its employees, the agency has actually made it harder to recruit and retain the career, professional workforce the public demanded following the terrible events of 9–11. TSA administrators have continued to disappoint the TSO workforce by failing to request additional funding from appropriators for a meaningful pay increase for long term TSOs. TSA administrators have, however, placed priority on funding requests for technology and canines.

The average starting salary for TSOs is about \$35,000. A newly-hired TSO begins in the D pay band and is required to complete a 2-year probationary period during which time there can be no disciplinary action. At the completion of probation, TSOs automatically receive the E pay band in addition to any Employee Cost Index (ECI), an annually-recommended Federal civilian employee pay increase. The majority of TSOs then remain stagnant at the E pay band for their entire career. In the event a TSO can secure a promotion to a Lead TSO, they go up one pay band to an F pay band. But the outlook from there is grim; TSA recently eliminated the ability of bargaining unit employees to be promoted to a G pay band position.

If TSOs can score high enough on the Transportation Officer Pay System, or TOPS evaluation, they may be eligible for a one-time bonus or a slight increase in salary. The TOPS “payout”—a combination of a percentage pay raise and bonus depending on evaluations and other factors—varies from year to year subject to the administrator’s announcement. Last year, the TOPs award for the highest rating of 5—achieved excellence, or 4—exceeds expectations was a 1 percent pay increase. If you scored a 3—achieved expectations, you received no pay increase. These inconsistent and miniscule performance-based increases, particularly when they are not combined with a time-in-grade increase, do very little to retain or reward the front-line aviation security workforce that protects us around the clock.

Any bonuses a TSO may earn under TOPS are not included in TSO base salaries and are not part of the calculation for their retirement under Federal Employee Retirement System. TSOs’ lack of opportunity for salary increases today has long-term financial consequences—less retirement income later in life. By contrast, most Federal workers have been compensated under the General Schedule (GS) pay system, which has been reformed and updated many times since its inception in 1949. The GS pay system includes step increases at various intervals to employees with satisfactory performance. When there is not a pay freeze, they also receive annual salary adjustments that include a Nation-wide and locality component. These pay adjustments are based on objective market data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and mirror the size and direction of salaries in the private sector and State and local

government. The GS pay system is notable for the absence of pay discrimination; people in the same job with the same level of performance receive the same salaries regardless of race, gender, age, or other attributes unrelated to the job they do for the American people.

Administrator Pekoske has advertised the Career Progression Program as a career path for TSOs that will both improve retention as TSOs move up the ladder and a means to improve pay. AFGE appreciates Administrator Pekoske's intentions, but the Career Progression Program, which TSA did not negotiate over with the Union, does not meet those goals. The Career Progression Program only assists new-hires in receiving pay increases to an E-band level more quickly than before but does absolutely nothing for long-term employees.

Additionally, as pointed out in the DHS OIG report, additional funding is needed to fill program positions. TSA has also promoted a new On the Job Trainers (OJTs) program as a way for officers to receive extra incentive pay but these opportunities are very limited and do not change an officer's salary. Federal Security Directors (FSDs) and other management determine how many OJTs they need depending on operational need and they decide who gets to be an OJT.

Many airports are located near major metropolitan areas with high costs of living. Many TSOs cannot afford a 2-bedroom apartment or pay a car note on their salaries. At airports such as San Jose International in Silicon Valley, TSA has offered TSOs recruitment and retention bonuses to maintain its workforce. At the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, TSA was required to raise TSO pay in response to the city's implementation of a minimum wage increase. TSA currently identifies 89 TSO essential job functions in its current TSO medical guidelines and has established rigorous standards for employment. TSOs are readily employable throughout the airport and other Federal agencies. The advantages of seeking employment with another Federal agency are substantial for a TSO: A likely significant pay increase, clear and achievable career progressions, full civil service rights under Title 5 of the U.S. Code, and the ability to maintain their commitment to public service. TSA is investing money to hire, train, and employ an officer only to see them leave for higher-paying private employment or go to another Federal agency within the GS pay system.

Finally, it is important to note that high-ranking TSA officials are paid under the Title 5 guidelines for the Senior Executive Service and the agency has sought special discretion to increase the pay of upper management. The 100 highest-paid TSA employees all earn over \$175,000 annually. By pointing out the disparity in pay between TSOs and the top brass at the agency we make no assumption that the executive pay is unearned. AFGE does find it highly inappropriate that the pay disparity between TSA management and TSOs is comparable to the pay difference of Walmart store managers and sales clerks.

TSO RETENTION ISSUES LEAD TO TSO STAFFING SHORTAGES

The findings of the DHS OIG report confirms AFGE's warnings that TSA has become a revolving door for the TSO workforce at many airports. TSA emphasizes the hiring of part-time TSOs even though the group is the most likely to leave the agency after a short period on the job. The information TSA provided the DHS OIG indicating the agency's attrition rate is at the same level as the rest of the Federal Government does not match what AFGE members witness at airports. TSOs at checkpoints are not OJTs, yet they assist the many newly-hired TSOs as they learn their duties and have noted that many appear ill-prepared. TSO schedules at some airports are constantly manipulated to meet airline arrivals and departures. As a result, TSOs have little stability in their schedules. Because there is little room in TSA's staffing decisions, at some airports nursing mothers report managers expect them to express breast milk only at specific designated times and are refused breaks as needed. Other TSOs have reported denial of bathroom breaks resulting in unnecessary and demeaning accidents. AFGE recommends that TSA hire an additional 5,000 TSOs to replace the staff decline allowed as passenger flows increased; increase starting salaries for new TSOs and provide pay increases to retain long-term TSOs; fully train new TSOs before deploying them to checkpoints; and work with the union to increase the retention of women TSOs.

MANY TSO S PERCEIVE TSA TO BE A HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The results of the DHS OIG report on TSA recruitment and retention of its TSO workforce matched AFGE's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) data which revealed that over a 10-year period between 2008 and 2018, TSA replaced its approximate 44,000 workforce. TSO duties are not easy. The initial responsibility for the safety of the flying public is assigned to TSOs screening passengers and baggage. Dealing

with passengers can be stressful and physically taxing, however, AFGE represents thousands of Federal employees with stressful and taxing positions. The difference is that Federal employees outside of TSA represented by AFGE do not work under the smothering cloak of unfairness described by their TSO brothers and sisters.

Under TSA's interpretation of ATSA, the agency makes and breaks the rules of employment. TSA reinvents pay standards annually. Airport checkpoints are often the fiefdoms of TSA management, reducing the likelihood of consistency between checkpoints or baggage screening areas. All levels of TSA management exercise extensive discretion in supervision and discipline of TSOs.

The late TSO Robert Henry was an AFGE member. Mr. Henry is the TSO who tragically took his own life at Orlando International Airport on February 2, 2019, and we mourn his loss. While we have no doubt that stress from lack of pay during the shutdown contributed to TSO Henry's suicide, we learned from fellow union members that he was the target of bullying and harassment at the hands of some in TSA management at the airport. Upon inquiry, AFGE learned that although TSO Henry and his colleagues complained about his mistreatment to TSA management, neither they nor TSO Henry was aware of steps taken to stop the bullying or discipline his harassers. In the months since TSO Henry's death, we have learned that TSO Henry's harassment was far from an isolated incident, and our Local presidents are concerned about suicides among their members. Below are some of the situations described by TSOs in response to an AFGE on-line survey:

- 3-year TSO at a Cat I airport: Bullying from passengers, lack of support from supervisors and managers. My airport is a horrible place to work.
- 9-year TSO at Cat X airport: I've reported it (name calling, demeaning nicknames, ostracism, unnecessary supervision, disparate treatment for mistakes and other behaviors) personally. I've reported it on behalf of union members as well. This garnered me reprisal, hostility, targeting, unfair discipline, an attempted termination, etc.
- 6-month TSO at Cat II airport: I did not report this information (bullying behaviors) to a supervisor because the supervisor was the offending party. Disparate treatment is the corporate culture at our airport. Random and capricious enforcement of rules and regulations, some people have been ostracized, training was so poor that one person was unable to complete training, abuse of leave, time off, and breaks by some people is not addressed which leaves the rest of us holding down the fort . . .
- 9-year TSO at Cat I airport: At the checkpoint where I currently work, it is not bad compared to other checkpoints at my airport. Everyone wants to work at this checkpoint because we have the best supervisors and a great manager that listens and tries her best to help, although there is only so much that she can do because upper management is lacking horribly. Some of the other checkpoints are very bad though, supervisors would yell at TSO's right in front of passengers or micromanage every situation and not give you room to do your job. One checkpoint has no air conditioning, people have passed out from heat exhaustion and nobody has done anything to fix it. All in all, my airport isn't as bad as most, but the stress of the job and upper management definitely affects my health. I was forced to get FMLA just so that I wouldn't get fired for all of the health problems I've been having since working here. I don't know how much longer I can do it. Call-out rates are extremely high for a reason. They need to realize what is going on here and do something fast. We need to at least be more reasonably compensated for the work that we do day in and day out.
- 9-year TSO Cat I airport: Filed grievance because of Supervisory Transportation Security Officer (STSO) behavior toward me. STSO violated employee code of conduct through intimidation and bullying unbecoming of a supervisor. Grievance denied by SRO. No investigation. Currently deciding on my options.
- 2.75-year TSO Cat X airport: Misgendering and being called by various male names as a transgender woman, berated for a "bad patdown" that everyone else saw no problem with, and then listed as temporarily not fit for duty for 6 months.
- 2.8-year TSO Cat X airport: Thankfully I've been able to cope with the stress as a previous work experience equipped me to deal with it. But the resources available to my other peers you might as well call a joke because that's what it is. In my opinion if we had Title 5 protection the working atmosphere would indeed improve because leadership will be very aware of the consequences of the wrongdoing.

These and other responses from across the country were strikingly similar in their details: Unfair treatment, no remedy when reported to management, and almost certain retaliation.

Unwarranted disciplinary actions against TSOs present an opportunity for badly-trained and poorly-managed supervisors to victimize TSOs. In 2018, TSA modified their table of penalties for the TSO workforce based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of progressive discipline. Progressive discipline provides increased penalties for particular types of conduct. Under TSA's version of progressive discipline, for example, a tardy will count as the first offense, an unrelated uniform violation as a second offense that includes a more severe disciplinary action which could lead to a proposed removal even though a tardy and a uniform violation are completely different forms of misconduct. There is little incentive to the employee to improve behavior or misconduct.

Each disciplinary action remains in the TSO's personnel files for 2 years. The mandatory 2-year presence of a previous disciplinary action in a personnel file negatively affects almost anything a TSO attempts to do at the agency. TSOs with disciplinary actions in their personnel files cannot transfer to another airport and face disqualification from the Career Progression program. Any corrective action, discipline, or sick leave restriction during the 12 months prior or during the OJT assignment is a disqualification and eliminates a large score of employees from receiving the highest TOPS rating.

The unrelentingly harsh disciplinary policies of TSA do not create a work environment that fosters workforce performance growth and improvement. A disciplinary action grinds a TSO's forward progress to a halt for at least 2 years. It is difficult for TSOs to clear their record without the right to appeal adverse personnel actions to the MSPB or a negotiated grievance and arbitration process.

AVAILABILITY OF COUNSELLING AND EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

AFGE is concerned about reports from Local Presidents regarding the availability of counselling and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) following suicides of TSOs working at their airports. While some said TSA provided ready access to counsellors, others relayed that counsellors spoke at shift briefings and their colleagues did not feel free to express themselves in public. Responses to our on-line TSO surveys described several instances of TSOs being unaware of EAP programs or how to receive help. TSA's on-line link to EAP programs sends TSOs to a Federal Occupational Health website. It is unclear if resources specifically tailored to the stress of TSO duties are available to the workforce.

THE FUTURE OF U.S. AVIATION SECURITY

Seventeen years ago, TSOs organized the first AFGE TSA local indicating a clear preference for union representation. They stood up for the union without statutory protections of their right to organize. AFGE is committed to the fight for full civil service rights and protections for the TSO workforce. Low pay, stressful duties, and a sense of unfairness create a trifecta for low morale and hopelessness that impedes the ability of TSOs to boldly serve as the front line of U.S. aviation security.

During Administrator Pekoske's April 9 testimony before this subcommittee, he would not commit to upcoming collective bargaining negotiations with AFGE. Our TSO membership has observed Administrator Pekoske's dismantling of the quarterly labor-management meetings while promoting the newly-formed Administrator's Action Group (AAG). AFGE, elected as exclusive representative of the entire TSO workforce—the bargaining unit defined by TSA—is conspicuously absent from the AAG. Currently, the AAG, along with FSDs, STSOs, and other managers are discussing a new awards program even though awards programs are a subject of collective bargaining as defined by TSA. It appears the AAG is a crude attempt at forming a company union within a Federal agency. Therefore, AFGE applauds the recent letter to Administrator Pekoske signed by majority Homeland Security Committee Members advocating for continuation of collective bargaining with AFGE and recognizing that bodies like the AAG will not exist as a substitute for the union elected by the TSO workforce to represent them.

We appreciate the continued advocacy of Chairman Thompson and House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey in support of title 5 rights for the TSO workforce. Their legislation, H.R. 1140, the Rights for Transportation Security Officers Act, is approaching almost 100 cosponsors in the House. When enacted into law the Rights for Transportation Security Officers Act, and its Senate companion, S. 944, the Strengthening America's Transportation Security Act introduced by Senator Brian Schatz, will provide permanence and predictability of the statutory rights and protections of title 5 of the U.S. Code, the fairness of negotiated grievance and arbitration provisions, and MSPB appeal rights lacking in the work lives of the TSO workforce.

Thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the TSO workforce represented by AFGE. I am prepared to answer any questions the subcommittee may have.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you for your testimony. I now recognize Mr. Lyttle to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF LANCE LYTTLE, MANAGING DIRECTOR,
AVIATION DIVISION, PORT OF SEATTLE**

Mr. LYTTLE. Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee, it is an honor for me to testify today. I am Lance Lyttle, managing director of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Sea-Tac serves one of the hottest economies in the country, which has made us the eighth-busiest airport in the United States. This increase in passengers is straining the capacity of our airport, and our security checkpoints.

One of our top priorities is efficient security screening of passengers. We want to avoid large group of travels on the public side of the airport, which is both a customer service and security issue. Lines that stretch through the terminal, past the ticket counters, over the sky bridges and into the parking garages compromise our ability to ensure public safety. Yet, we see the scenario too often, even before our summer peak season has begun, including just this weekend.

The ability of TSA to hire and retain staff is a major contributor to this challenge. In my time at Sea-Tac, TSA has never had the staff to open every screening lane. This is because it is difficult for TSA to attract and retain workers. A Bloomberg law study found that between 2012 and 2016, TSA hired 858 TSOs at Sea-Tac but lost 772, which is an attrition rate of 90 percent. In the last 2 months alone, approximately 80 TSOs have left for other jobs. This is not a criticism of TSA leadership, the local \$15 minimum wage and robust economy means that someone can choose between working an entry-level job, or protecting our Nation's aviation security.

The recent news of potential TSA staffing at the U.S. Southern Border has all airports very concerned. Significant diversion of TSOs would reduce TSA's ability to open all security lanes during morning peak this summer, which could result in lines out of our parking garage as often as 4 to 5 days per week.

Before I go further, I want to share our appreciation for our local TSOs during the recent Government shutdown. The dedication with which they came to work every day was awe-inspiring. We are grateful for their professionalism during an incredibly stressful time. I also want to acknowledge that TSA leadership has been very engaged with us. For example, TSA has approved a temporary increase in wages for Sea-Tac TSOs, now starting at more than \$20 an hour. TSA also promised to assign 50 National deployment force TSOs for the summer.

The most effective way for a TSA to remain fully staffed at our airport is increased retention rates. Not only is it expensive to hire TSOs, but it can take months for a new officer to be certified to perform all functions. Lower turnover rates and decreased cycle time for recruitment and training will lead to more efficient and effective TSOs. This is especially urgent because the changes of TSA

passenger screening canine protocols have significantly reduced the dog's use in addressing wait times.

To compensate, Sea-Tac has had to make significant investment of its own money, including providing port staff and to perform nonregulatory TSA functions, which we can't afford to continue indefinitely.

Let me close by saying, I don't have all the solutions to the challenges that TSA faces in hiring and retention. I can say, however, that higher compensation is an important part of the puzzle, because our own security screeners who staff checkpoints for airport employees start at \$21.71 per hour, and we have very little turnover in those jobs.

Our vision for Sea-Tac is a world-class security and customer experience. We don't want travelers stuck waiting in security lines, and we don't want large groups on the public side of the airport creating a potential soft target. So sufficient TSA staffing is essential to achieve those goals, and I look forward to working with you to achieve them.

Thank you again for the opportunity today and I look forward to any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lyttle follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LANCE LYTTLE

MAY 21, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today on the importance of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workforce to the efficient, secure, and reliable operation of airports. It is an honor for me to be here.

My name is Lance Lyttle, and I am the managing director of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac). Before I address today's topic, let me start by providing some context about our airport, both in terms of our region and the passengers we serve.

Sea-Tac serves one of the hottest economies in the country. With innovative companies such as Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft, and Starbucks along with disruptive startups in biotechnology, global health, retail, manufacturing, and information technology, the Seattle region's economy is booming and has one of the fastest-growing populations in the country.

The unemployment rate in our county is now at 3.6 percent as of March 2019. That figure contributes to a highly competitive job market, which is driving wage increases from employers large and small. In addition, both the city of Seattle and the city of SeaTac (where our airport is located) have instituted \$15 minimum wages.

This regional economic growth has been a major factor in making Sea-Tac the 8th-busiest airport in the country in terms of passenger volumes, increasing from approximately 31 million travelers served in 2010 to almost 50 million last year. We are proud of the role we serve in the region's on-going economic vitality—making travel to and from the Seattle region convenient, accessible, and affordable—but this growth is straining the capacity of our airport and specifically our security checkpoints.

One of our airport's top priorities is ensuring swift and reliable processing at TSA passenger screening checkpoints. We see this need both as a customer service issue as well as a security issue—avoiding long lines of travelers on the public side of the airport who become potential soft targets. When we have lines that stretch through the terminal, past the ticket counters, over the skybridges, and into the parking garages, our ability to ensure perimeter security is compromised, to say the least.

Unfortunately, we have seen that exact scenario on a regular basis at Sea-Tac, even before we enter our summer peak travel period. Average wait times—based on how we measure wait times, which is different than TSA—are often double our 20-minute goal for throughput. This summer we expect to regularly see over 70,000 travelers per day at TSA checkpoints.

Our terminal facilities are certainly insufficient for the processing of that many travelers, but there is no doubt that the ability of TSA to hire and retain sufficient staffing is also a major contributor to this challenge. In my time at Sea-Tac, TSA has never had the staff to open every single screening lane at our airport. We believe that opening every lane would allow TSA to process approximately 5,800 passengers per hour, which is about what we see on a peak travel day. And so, it becomes a math problem: Do we have those lanes open to process passengers in a timely manner, or do we have long wait times, compromised security, frustrated travelers, and missed flights?

Ensuring sufficient staffing to fully open our checkpoints is not necessarily a Congressional or a TSA budget issue, but rather the result of local TSA management having an incredibly difficult time hiring to meet its allocated staffing number. In fact, at Sea-Tac, TSA loses Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) almost as fast as it hires them. A Bloomberg Law study found that—between 2012 to 2016—TSA hired 858 TSOs at Sea-Tac but lost 772. This is a 90 percent attrition rate. Over the last 2 months alone, as many as 80 TSOs have left Sea-Tac for other positions in the region.

I point this out not as a criticism of local TSA leadership but simply to highlight the incredible challenge they face. Despite their best efforts with hiring fairs and recruiting bonuses, a hot local economy and a \$15 minimum wage mean that someone can choose relatively equally between working at any entry-level job in the local economy and protecting our Nation's aviation security. And the alternative job often doesn't require the same challenges as being a TSO, in terms of both customer interactions and security responsibilities.

Sea-Tac is not alone in facing TSO hiring and retention challenges. While we certainly have unique aspects of our economy, several other regions throughout the country have highlighted these issues—from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Denver to Boston to Nashville. It is no coincidence that these are all fast-growing regions, both in terms of their economies and their populations, which makes TSO hiring difficult.

The recent news of TSA staffing needs at the U.S. Southern Border has all of us in the airport industry very concerned. Any significant diversion of TSOs away from our airport reduces the likelihood that TSA will be able to open all 31 of our security lanes during morning peak this summer. Given our current staffing levels, major reassignment of screeners could result in passenger screening lines out to our parking garage as often as 4 to 5 days per week this summer.

Before I go any further, I want to take a moment to share our appreciation for the commitment of our local TSA workforce. Thanks to their dedication, we avoided TSO staffing challenges at Sea-Tac during the Federal Government shutdown at the beginning of this year. The dedication with which TSOs came to work every day—regardless of the financial pressures they faced without a paycheck—was truly awe-inspiring, and we are deeply grateful for their professionalism and positive attitude during what must have been an incredibly stressful time. We were honored to be able to celebrate and support them during this period with donations from the community.

I also want to acknowledge that TSA leadership has been very engaged with us on the staffing and retention issues at Sea-Tac. TSA Administrator Pekoske earlier this year approved a temporary increase in wages for TSOs in economies like Seattle, and Sea-Tac TSOs now start at more than \$20 per hour. We deeply value the collaborative relationship we have with TSA, and their partnership with us on providing effective security while minimizing wait times at our airport. TSA leadership plans to assign 50 temporary National Deployment Force (NDF) TSOs to our airport this summer to help counterbalance the shortage in permanent staffing.

However, a major international hub airport like ours cannot rely on temporary measures to solve our wait times issues. TSA needs to be fully, permanently staffed at our airport to handle our growing passenger volumes, and the most effective way to achieve that goal is to increase retention rates. Not only is it expensive to keep hiring new TSOs, but it can take months for a new officer to be fully certified to perform all regulatory functions; at our airport right now, there are over 50 level 1 and level 2 TSOs who are limited to exit lane staffing, divestiture, travel document checking, and other basic functions. These new hires then wait for a slot at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia and must be away from the airport for several weeks to get trained. Lower turnover rates—combined with decreased cycle times for recruitment, hiring, and training—will lead to more efficient and effective TSA officers who can help us meet both our throughput and customer service goals. Perhaps more importantly, we know that those officers will also be better at ensuring security at our airport and for our travelers.

As a side note, one of the reasons that we are so concerned about staffing levels is that changes to protocols for TSA passenger screening canines have made that

resource significantly less efficient. These dogs used to be our solution to compensate for staffing shortages, because they could double the throughput of screening lanes. With the new operational directive—which I fully appreciate was done for security reasons—these canines only provide a modest increase in efficiency. I share this development not to ask for a change in canine protocols, but to point out that staffing levels are now the primary tool in our toolbox for addressing wait time issues, other than incremental technology improvements.

The other impact of TSA staffing shortages has been on the airport's own resources. Because of long wait times and our focus on ensuring a positive customer experience, Sea-Tac has made significant investments of its own money: Adding additional lanes at existing checkpoints, installing exit lane technology and Automated Screening Lanes, and even providing Port and contractor staffing on a voluntary and temporary basis to perform non-regulatory functions—such as exit lanes, queue management, and divestiture—so that TSOs are freed up for core responsibilities. We cannot afford to continue to shoulder this burden.

Let me close by saying that I don't have all the solutions to the challenges that TSA faces in hiring and retaining its workforce. As I've mentioned, the factors impacting this challenge—particularly for an airport like ours—are diverse and complicated, and there clearly isn't one magic solution. My goal today is simply to help explain how TSA workforce issues directly impact airports and their travelers.

I do believe, however, that higher compensation is an important part of the puzzle, because of the natural experiment taking place at our airport. Sea-Tac is one of the few airports in the country that conducts full employee screening, requiring all airport workers traveling to the sterile side of the airport to go through a security screening process that is similar to a TSA checkpoint. To handle this work, the Port of Seattle has hired close to 80 employees—represented by the ILWU—as our Full Employee Screening (FES) team. Those FES employees receive a starting wage of \$21.71 per hour, and we have had extremely little turnover in those jobs. Of course, the FES checkpoint is much less challenging than a TSA checkpoint because of the travelers themselves, but the analogy is certainly indicative.

Our vision for Sea-Tac is a world-class security and customer experience, and that's why we're committed to meeting our region's growing air travel demand with an improved level of service: Addressing road and curbside congestion, minimizing terminal crowding and reducing airfield delay. We want our travelers to enjoy our exciting new dining and retail offerings, not be stuck waiting in a security line. And we certainly don't want large groups of people on the soft side of the airport creating a potential target for those with bad intentions. Sufficient TSA staffing is an essential component to those goals, and I welcome the opportunity to work with all of you to achieve them.

Thank you again for the opportunity today, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you for your testimony. I now recognize Mr. Neal to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JEFFREY NEAL, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, ICF

Mr. NEAL. Good morning, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee. I am honored to appear before this subcommittee to discuss the work of the Blue Ribbon panel and our findings and recommendations. The panel was chartered by TSA at the direction of Administrator Pekoske to provide a neutral third-party review of TSA's Human Capital operations. He also asked that we examine how Human Capital policy decisions have affected the Transportation Security Officer workforce.

Other members of the panel are former OPM Deputy Director Dan Blair, former Partnership for Public Service Vice President John Palguta, and noted labor economist, Dr. Laurie Bassi. We conducted a series of interviews, 36 focus groups with TSOs, and analyzed survey results, reports, and other data. Our findings were in two areas, two major areas: Support for the TSO workforce, and Human Capital service delivery. TSO has identified multiple drivers of morale problems and turnover, including perceptions of fa-

voritism and promotions and work assignments, inadequate pay, and challenging working conditions. The most significant of those was pay.

The panel found TSO pay was competitive at some airports and not at others. High TSO turnover during the first 2 to 3 years, and performance management and pay policies mean an E-Band TSO with an outstanding performance rating could take 30 years to reach the top of the Pay Band. The panel made multiple recommendations regarding pay, Pay Band progression, use of promotion boards to provide transparency in promotions, establishing new TSO positions in higher Pay Bands, and use of predictive modeling to assess the effects of pay on turnover.

Improving TSA's Human Capital programs requires an effective Human Capital infrastructure. TSA Human Capital services are provided by a mix of the Office of Human Capital, airport staff, and three major contractors. The panel found that TSA needs to do much more to define and coordinate the work of those groups.

The panel also found that improvements are needed in the Office of Human Capital. Some areas, such as position classification, experience an overwhelming workload aggravated by their own policy decisions. We found disjointed Human Capital systems to create inefficiencies, make errors more likely, and require significant work-arounds to consume valuable labor hours.

The field H.R. staff we interviewed were also striving to deliver good service, but did not have consistent H.R. training, and were not always permanently assigned to H.R. Our recommendations to address this situation included permanent assignments, standard job descriptions, better training, and aligning the jobs with TSA's new Human Capital business partner positions. We believe these will ensure a stronger field H.R. staff who are better equipped to meet the needs of TSOs.

We interviewed project leaders from the firms providing H.R. services who reported some of the same IT problems as Federal staff, amplified by the lack of an integrator for the three major contracts. Each firm offered ideas for improving services.

The panel made several recommendations for improvements to the 270-day TSO hiring process. The lag between applying and beginning work causes many applicants to drop out, as does the technology supporting hiring. For example, the panel learned that many applicants who attended recruiting events did so because they were unable to apply via USA Jobs. Increased competition for talent means a 9-month process will cause significant hiring challenges for TSA. TSA's ATSA flexibilities should enable it to make improvements to its hiring process.

Finally, the panel heard many suggestions that TSA transition to the General Schedule to solve pay and hiring problems. We share concerns regarding TSO pay, but believe the General Schedule would not solve the problems. Most good Government organizations have recommended replacing it with a system that is better suited to today's workforce. Transitioning the TSO workforce to the general schedule could also have unintended consequence and result in pay raises in locations where they are not needed, and inadequate pay raises in locations where they are very badly needed.

There is no guarantee the general schedule would even result in grades that would increase overall pay.

The panel believes the most effective way to move quickly to solve TSO pay is to seek additional labor dollars and use TSA's existing flexibilities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Neal follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEFFREY NEAL

MAY 21, 2019

Good morning Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. I am honored to appear before this subcommittee to discuss the work of the Blue Ribbon Panel and our findings and recommendations.

The panel was chartered by TSA at the direction of Administrator David P. Pekoske to provide a neutral third-party review of TSA's Human Capital Operations. He also asked that we examine how human capital policy decisions have affected the Transportation Security Officer (or TSO) workforce. During our initial meeting with Administrator Pekoske, it was evident to the panel that he is seeking solutions to address human capital issues and, specifically, to deal with concerns from Transportation Security Officers.

Other members of the panel are former OPM Deputy Director Dan Blair, former Partnership for Public Service Vice President John Palguta, noted Labor Economist Dr. Laurie Bassi. We interviewed members of TSA's Office of Human Capital staff, leaders of other Headquarters organizations, visited 7 airports where we conducted 36 Focus Groups with Transportation Security Officers. We met with the firms that provide much of TSA's Human Capital support, and also reviewed numerous TSA documents and plans, examined customer service and employee survey data, and conducted a variety of quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Our findings were in two major areas:

- Support for the TSO Workforce, and
- Human Capital Service Delivery.

We spent a considerable amount of our time looking at issues that related to the TSOs, who identified multiple drivers of morale problems and turnover, including perceptions of favoritism in promotions and work assignments, pay, and working conditions. The most significant of those issues was pay.

The panel found that TSO pay was competitive in some labor markets, and not at all competitive in others. Some airports are competing with employers, such as Amazon, that draw from a similar entry-level talent pool. TSA has a high level of TSO turnover during their first 2 to 3 years, and performance management and pay policies make it difficult for TSOs to advance in their Pay Bands. For example, an E-Band TSO with an outstanding performance rating could take 30 years to reach the top of the Pay Band. The panel noted that while TSO turnover is higher compared to other agencies, it is not high in comparison to many private-sector employers who recruit from a similar entry level talent pool, where turnover of 20 percent is not uncommon. What distinguishes TSA is the investment of significant resources in training new officers and their critical homeland security mission, which make turnover costly and disruptive. The panel made multiple recommendations to address TSO pay, progression within pay bands, use of promotion boards to provide transparency in promotions, establishment of new TSO positions in higher Pay Bands, and use of predictive modeling to determine the relationship between pay and turnover.

Improving TSA's human capital programs requires an effective human capital infrastructure. TSA's Human Capital Services are provided by a mix of Office of Human Capital, airport staff, and three major contractors. The panel found that TSA needs to do more to delineate the responsibilities of those groups.

The panel also found that the Office of Human Capital suffers from poor morale, inadequate teamwork and lack of strategic focus to inform policy and program decisions. Some areas, such as position classification, experience an overwhelming workload aggravated by their own policy decisions. We found a high level of frustration among the Human Capital staff and their customers, people who genuinely want to deliver good service. Some of that frustration was the result of TSA's disjointed Human Capital systems that create inefficiencies, make errors more likely, and require significant work-arounds that consume valuable labor hours.

The field H.R. staff we interviewed are also striving to deliver good service, but often lacked training on H.R. matters needed to succeed. Many are former officers who have not received adequate training, or are on details to H.R. Some are transferred back to screening operations just as they become comfortable with the H.R. duties. The panel made a number of recommendations for addressing this situation, including establishing permanent assignments, standardizing job descriptions, providing better training, and ensuring alignment with newly established Human Capital Business Partner positions. The panel believes these will ensure a stronger field H.R. staff who are equipped to meet the needs of TSOs at their work locations.

We also interviewed project leaders from the firms providing H.R. services. Those services include Human Capital Help Desk support, hiring, and technology infrastructure and systems. Most reported the same IT problems as Federal staff, amplified by the lack of an Integrator for the three major contracts. Each firm offered ideas for improving services.

The panel made several recommendations for improvements to the TSO hiring process, which now averages about 270 days. The lag between applying and beginning work causes many applicants to drop out, as does the technology supporting hiring. For example, USAJobs is designed for the larger Federal workforce, including current Federal workers. TSA competes for entry-level talent who are not accustomed to Government hiring processes. The panel learned that many applicants who attended recruiting events did so because they were unable to apply via USAJobs. A 9-month hiring process in tight labor markets where private-sector employers make offers in a fraction of the time, combined with low unemployment, will cause significant hiring challenges for TSA. TSA's ATSA flexibilities will enable it to make improvements that are not available to agencies covered by Title 5.

Finally, the panel heard many suggestions that TSA transition to the General Schedule to solve pay and hiring problems. If the panel believed such a move would accomplish those goals, we would agree. We believe it would not. The agencies that use the General Schedule complain about its inflexibility and lack of labor market sensitivity. It still takes 18 years to get to Step 10.

General Schedule job classification is governed by classification standards that often take OPM years to develop and infrequently updated. The National Academy of Public Administration, the Partnership for Public Service, and other good Government organizations have recommended replacing the General Schedule with a system that is better suited to today's workforce, versus an outdated system designed for the mostly clerical workforce of 1949.

Not only is the General Schedule inflexible, transitioning the TSO workforce from current pay bands to GS grades and steps could have significant unintended consequences. It could result in pay raises in locations where they are not needed, and inadequate pay raises where they are badly needed. In fact, there is no guarantee the General Schedule would result in grade levels that would actually increase overall pay, and any pay raises would still require appropriation of more labor dollars. Given all of this uncertainty, including the potential for civil service reform, and the likelihood that the General Schedule would not solve the most critical hiring and pay problems, the panel believes the most effective way to move quickly to solve TSO pay and hiring issues is to increase the use of flexibilities TSA already has under ATSA.

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CORREA [presiding]. Thank you very much, gentlemen. I recognize myself for a few questions. For AFGC national president, Mr. Cox, the current collective bargaining unit is set to expire in December of this year. Administrator Pekoske, at the last committee hearing, refused to commit to continue to allow collective bargaining at TSA.

Can you tell us what the advantage is? What are the benefits of collective bargaining to the TSO workforce?

Mr. COX. Part of it, I believe, the law when the Congress has passed, it says collective bargaining is in the public's best interest, and the public is best served by collective bargaining. The TSO workforce, labor, and management sat down and bargained over things, such as uniform allowances, parking subsidies, over schedule changes, how the posting of annual leave, many positions and

things of that nature that they bargain over. However, in TSA we have a very limited scope of bargaining. We do not have a full grievance procedure or arbitration procedure. We don't have the ability to go to MSPB, so granting full collective bargaining rights would treat them like all other Federal employees.

Mr. CORREA. So I heard comments earlier that we have a very competitive labor market at the moment. We have high turnover at TSA. A lot of our front-line employees seem to move in and out. This collective bargaining, this organized labor, any representation, do you bring a different perspective in terms of how to craft a package of benefits, say, salary, to be competitive enough to keep our workforce stable?

Mr. COX. Clearly, I think, I wages have got to be raised. I have heard that from every panelist here that TSOs are paid——

Mr. CORREA. Well, I think if you ask any—any of us, wages need to be raised, but——

Mr. COX. Pay is affecting it, sir.

Mr. CORREA. I think the turnover is unbelievable, and to me, it is scary when you really need to have a trained workforce that can do the job year after year, not have to train new entrants into that workforce year after year.

So my question is, are you able to calibrate, are you able to give management some input so that we can, you know, reduce workforce turnover?

Mr. COX. Yes, sir. I believe by having a negotiated grievance procedure, the right to go to a third party to resolve disputes. The ability to have full scope collective bargain that all other Federal employees have, just like all the other employees in Homeland Security, Border Patrol, ICE agents, Coast Guard, Federal Protective Service, Customs, all of those have full Title V collective bargaining rights. Treat them like full U.S. citizens like other Government employees, and I believe you would see less turnover. You would see morale improve, and that that would certainly help as well.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Cox, I am going to cut you off, I am running out of time. I am going to shift to Mr. Kelly. Sir, saving taxpayer dollars, how does a stable workforce save taxpayer dollars? How much do you think was wasted over the fiscal years 2016, 2017, over attrition? Every time you hire somebody there is a cost. Every time you train somebody there is a cost. Can you talk on that issue?

Mr. KELLY. Well, as I——

Mr. CORREA. It costs the taxpayers beyond just the dangers of security or not?

Mr. KELLY. Chairman, as I mentioned in my opening statement, in fiscal year 2017, TSA spent \$75 million to hire and train roughly 9,000 individuals that they brought on board.

Mr. CORREA. Seventy-five million dollars. How much is that per new individual that is hired?

Mr. KELLY. It costs TSA about \$8,500 to train and hire someone.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you very much. That being said, I am going to turn over now to Mrs. Lesko for 5 minutes of questions. Mrs. Lesko.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first question is for Mr. Neal. Thank you for your work on the Blue Ribbon Panel.

As you said in your opening statement and is in your report, you strongly suggest that TSA not adopt the General Schedule, and you gave some of the reasons why. What—what are the other—why would it be bad?

Mr. NEAL. Yes, ma'am. The problem with the General Schedule is that it is—is a very inflexible system. It was designed 70 years ago at a time when the Federal workforce was primarily clerks and where the variations in pay in various labor markets were nowhere near as extreme as they are right now.

So what happens with the General Schedule is you may find that pay raises are not really necessary for some folks in some places, yet because of the mechanical formula of the GS schedule, they would get pay raises. In other places—New York is a great example, JFK—where pay raises are desperately needed, the General Schedule wouldn't provide anywhere near the amount of pay that those officers would need to have a living wage.

So what we concluded was that—that the pay definitely needs to be addressed. This is a significant problem for the agency. But the General Schedule is too blunt an instrument to do it. So the better way, we thought, was to use the flexibilities under ATSA to provide pay raises.

We did recommend pay raises rather than supplemental locality raises, that are not actually pay raises, you know, where it is a retention incentive. We thought retention incentives were less effective because they can be taken away, where a base pay increase can't.

But for the most part what we found was that it was just too blunt an instrument to actually be effective. So that was the reason we did not recommend going to the General Schedule.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Neal.

My next question is for Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Kelly, one of the reasons you said that there is a great amount of retention among TSOs is that, not only the pay, which we have talked about, but you said scheduling issues, I think especially with part-time employees. I think, from what I remember, you said it is because part-time employees maybe kind-of fill in and so they have erratic scheduling time.

Did you have any recommendations on that particular part of it for TSA, and have they started working on that?

Mr. KELLY. We had 9 recommendations to basically more professionalize the workforce, and we did have some recommendations that addressed that. I believe they are still working on those recommendations. I will get back to you specifically as to whether or not what the status is.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you very much. Yeah, because in the report, like you said—I thought you did a good job on the report. It highlighted serious inconsistencies at Federalized airports across the country relating to training, which we talked about, recruitment, and exit surveys.

So what metrics can the committee look for to see if TSA is actually following your recommendations? What do you think we should look back? When you do go back and—

Mr. KELLY. Well, we are considering doing verification review on these issues, because this is a critical issue, as I mentioned in the very beginning of my comments or oral statement, that there is a link between safety and retention. So we are very concerned with the turnover rates that exist with TSOs.

People have to realize that this needs to be a profession as opposed to a part-time job for individuals. If we expect to have a secure traveling public, we need professionals performing at the security checkpoints.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you.

Back to Mr. Neal. I think one of the problems, if I remember, from my readings on my plane ride here, long plane ride into DC, was that people at the beginning scale, the, you know, entry level, didn't feel like they were going to be able to move up and get the top salary of the Pay Bands. Did your blue-ribbon panel have any recommendations on how to address this?

Mr. NEAL. Yes, ma'am, we did. We looked at a variety of options. One was providing some limited longevity increases to get people up to the center of the Pay Band. The other was to provide more higher Pay Band TSO positions. Right now, TSOs are basically E bands. We put in a recommendation that would provide for increasing TSO positions, smaller numbers of them, all the way up, about 4 or 5 bands higher than they are right now, to provide some clear career paths for TSOs that they don't have right now.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you. I yield back. I went over time.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mrs. Lesko.

I would like to recognize the Chairman of the Homeland Security, Mr. Thompson, from the good State of Mississippi.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have for quite a while looked at this pay system for TSOs. For the life of me, I am having difficulty in continuing to listen to the justification of not putting them in the GSA system pay scale where all other Federal employees happen to be. If it is so good, then why can't we just have one system? That bothers me.

Mr. Kelly, are you aware of that dual personnel system that TSA operates under?

Mr. KELLY. That they are not under the GS system? I understand that. That is correct.

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, but there is a personnel system for TSOs and there is another personnel system for other people who work in the Department.

Mr. KELLY. Yes.

Mr. THOMPSON. Are you aware of any other agency that runs dual personnel systems?

Mr. KELLY. I am not sure that there other agencies that have that situation. We did not look into the merits, or lack thereof, of the—

Mr. THOMPSON. But you could, just on general principle, assume that that would be confusing at best?

Mr. KELLY. It can be confusing. I don't know for specifically for which system is best for TSOs.

Mr. THOMPSON. I understand. I just—I just still struggling with coming up with dual personnel systems for one agency.

The other issue, Mr. Cox, we have seen people in management in TSA get \$30,000 in bonuses. What is the—and you talked a little bit about it—what is the maximum a TSO can get in bonuses?

Mr. COX. Most of them receive about \$500 in a bonus, if they get a bonus, and very few of them get bonuses. So it is a much smaller amount.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yeah. That is part of that dual system. Now, to the last administrator's credit, he pulled it back to \$10,000 as the max they could get. But that is still a long ways from \$500 for our front-line people.

Mr. Lyttle, as an airport director, if deployment to the Southern Border becomes a reality, what does that do for an airport like Sea-Tac and you lose people to that deployment?

Mr. LYTTLE. I really understand and appreciate the importance of protecting the Southern Border, and I appreciate the challenges that are being faced in terms of allocating resources. But it is also equally important for us to protect the airport itself as well.

As I mentioned earlier, we are really struggling up to this weekend in terms of the resources that we have at the airport via the TSOs, right. Now, we just do not have enough officers to man all the lanes. I have been at the airport 3½ years, and we have never had enough staff to man all the lanes that we have, the 31 lanes at the airport.

Just this weekend, we had lines going over onto the sky bridges, almost into the garages. If the TSOs are reallocated somewhere else, we will have lines going out into the garage.

Mr. THOMPSON. So your testimony to the committee is you are already short of help?

Mr. LYTTLE. Yes.

Mr. THOMPSON. And anything that would reduce what you have is—puts you at potentially a greater risk?

Mr. LYTTLE. Just going to make it riskier.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you. Has anyone from TSA sat down with you and discussed the possible deployment of TSA personnel to the Southern Border?

Mr. LYTTLE. Not as yet.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Cox, have you had a discussion with anyone in TSA about a strategy for deploying TSOs to the border, what they would be doing if they got there, how much they would be paid once they got there, and who would pay for it?

Mr. COX. No, sir, I have not. The only thing that we have heard is what we read in the newspaper. We are the exclusive representative of the employees.

Mr. THOMPSON. So your membership roster for TSOs is how many?

Mr. COX. We represent about 44,000.

Mr. THOMPSON. So your testimony to this committee is that the 44,000 members of AFGE who are being asked to volunteer, to your knowledge, there is no strategy or no communication whatsoever that has been provided their duly authorized representative?

Mr. COX. Not to my knowledge, sir.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to recognize Mr. Katko from the good State of New York for 5 minutes of questions, sir.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you all for being here today. Before I get into my questions, I do want to make an observation. That is this: During the shutdown, I think the TSOs acted in an exemplary manner, by and large. Under extraordinarily different circumstances, they came to work, they did their jobs, and they kept us safe. That can't be underscored enough when we are looking at this whole issue.

So as I often—every time I have an opportunity to say that, I do. We ask them to do the impossible day in and day out with very little pay, and I think that is very commendable of them, especially given the gravity of their responsibilities.

Now, with that being said, I do want to just ask all of you just a quick poll question here. Do you all agree that we should try and get better compensation to the TSO officers? Everyone agree with that?

Everyone, OK.

So the question is how to get there, right? So let's talk about that a minute.

If, Mr. Neal, you say that the Title 5 route is not the way to go, how can we go there and ensure that we get better pay for these folks and institutionalize that?

Mr. NEAL. The first step in getting better pay, obviously, is to appropriate more labor dollars to TSA to pay for it. Based on getting more money, then TSA can look at where the money could best be used.

What we found is that there is a relationship between private-sector security guard pay and turnover among TSOs. Where E band TSOs are not paid well and private security guards are paid well, airports suffer very high turnover. So we can do some modeling that would show where labor dollars could be applied that would actually reduce turnover. Some of that obviously would be new money, but once you got started with that, a good chunk of that \$70 million a year that is spent on recruiting and training new employees could be applied to TSO pay. So we think that is the way to do it.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you.

Mr. Cox and/or Mr. Kelly, the previous two terms I was chair of this TSA subcommittee, and during that time, it was acutely aware to us that turnover was a major problem, and it was right around 20 percent. Has that improved at all in recent times?

Mr. KELLY. The overall turnover rate is 17 percent, which is close to that. What is really bad is the temporary employees. The turnover rate for temporary employees is 26 percent. So that is basically a quarter of a good portion of their employees have a—are attriting.

Mr. KATKO. Mr. Cox, given the fact that it does seem to be very persistent and consistent—consistently high, what kind of cost do you think is incurred and the waste that is incurred with this high turnover in training employees and losing them?

Mr. COX. I believe I heard that it cost \$7,500 just to train one employee and all of the other things that goes in. It is millions of dollars in the process of a year. I keep hearing it is not good to put

them on the GS scale, that there is problems with the GS scale, but the GS scale keeps working for all other Federal employees. It seems to be TSA is the one that is having the greatest turnover.

So if we have got a wheel that is working, why not use it, put them on the GS pay scale until we can figure out something better?

Mr. KATKO. Right. The thing that strikes me is if you could save that \$7,500 and dedicate it toward pay by reducing the turnover, you are probably in much better shape right now, regardless of what we do with Title 5.

Now, I do want to end on a better note, because it is important that we understand that there has been some progress made. Administrator Pekoske has taken this issue on, and he did do things to try and professionalize the force and give them more of a sense of duty and purpose, including opening a training center, which I think has been a very good thing.

When you were doing your report, Mr. Neal, what were some of the things you saw that gave you hope that there is some progress being made in the workforce management areas? Then finish it by telling us what we need to work on still. I know pay is obvious. What else?

Mr. NEAL. The administrator is clearly interested in improving a lot of the TSOs, and so that was very encouraging. Putting in place a mechanism for pay advancement for D band and then for E band TSOs, which they are doing now, was also a very positive move. So that was good.

The things that we are looking at still are nonpay issues that need to be addressed are the perception of unfairness in the promotion process. We believe there needs to be much more transparency there. We recommended promotion boards so people would understand what it takes to get a promotion, and then have a group of people who are not necessarily their bosses deciding whether or not they get promoted. So we think that would be very helpful as well.

Then making some major improvements in the office of human capital to be able to really run a modern and up-to-date human capital program in the agency.

Mr. KATKO. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the time.

I just want to note, please extend my heartfelt thanks to TSO officers. I am constantly amazed at what they do trying to find that needle in a haystack every day. It is so vitally important. We can't pay them enough, and we can't treat them as good as we possibly can—I mean, we should treat them as good as we possibly can and need to improve on both of those things.

Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Katko.

I concur with Mr. Katko, thank those employees from the bottom of our hearts for doing a great job under a very tough situation.

Now I would like to recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Demings, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of our witnesses for being with us today as we discuss this very important issue.

President Cox, I want to also thank you for your commitment to your members' well-being and taking the time to speak before us today so we can hear directly from you.

For the years that I have been a Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, President Cox, you have consistently spoken about the strain to our TSA officers and share the long hours they work, often made more difficult due to erratic scheduling practices, and spoken of the strain on officers and their families who struggle to get the wages that they—that are so low, that are much lower than other Federal employees, comparatively speaking, especially when it pertains to their experience and their duties. I think that is a topic that we need to continue to address until we get it right.

Earlier this month, TSA requested that TSOs and other employees deploy to the Southwest Border. I, like many others, wonder about the capacity in which they would be supporting Custom and Border Patrol operations.

USA Today has now reported that the 400 TSA employees will be performing meal preparation, property management, and legal assistance for asylum petitioners. Now, having been assigned to the Orlando International Airport during 9/11, I just can't believe that that would be a proper use of the men and women of the TSA.

But I would like to ask you, President Cox, are these duties commensurate with their specialized training and experience?

Mr. COX. Not to my knowledge. They are trained to do the screening at the airports, to look at the luggage that goes through the screens to be able to identify weapons, liquids, and those type things. I am not aware of any type training at the law enforcement academy on serving of meals and preparation of meals and those type things that goes on there.

Mrs. DEMINGS. You know that the men and women who serve in those various roles, I think we all know, on both sides of the aisle, that our most precious resource are the men and women who work for us, right, and do a very important and critical job. I personally know about the strains of erratic schedules, long hours, unanticipated schedules, and new conditions being introduced last minute.

So as you, President Cox, have already talked about, if officers are reassigned, does this just further exacerbate an already overworked and burdened workforce? Could you speak on their behalf on that area?

Mr. COX. Clearly it does. I am a registered nurse by profession, so I understand what erratic shifts are and 24-hour-a-day operations. With TSA, because the airlines change flights, there are times that the screeners come in in the morning and maybe some flights have been canceled. They say, well, please go back home, even though they showed up at 4 a.m. or 5 a.m., come back in at 2 p.m., work till later in the evening, but we want you back at 4 a.m. the next morning.

You can maybe do that one time or two times. You can't do that on a daily basis because people do need rest, they have child care, they have responsibilities of their family.

Mrs. DEMINGS. You know, I heard an Army general talking about how he may lead an operation and certainly make very critical decisions. But in order to make sure that he is doing the right thing

and making the right choices, he always talks to the men and women on the front line.

I think I heard you say, I believe to the Chairman, that no one, to your knowledge, had really sat down and talked to you or any of the supervisors or men and women on the front line of the TSA about reassignments and getting their suggestions and recommendations on how they may be better utilized. Is that—

Mr. COX. You are correct. They have not.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you very much.

I now recognize Mr. Cleaver from Missouri for a round of questions.

Mr. Cleaver, welcome.

Mr. CLEAVER. Mr. Chairman.

I try always not to get angry. My football coach told me he was going to remove me as captain if I had a fight on the field. That kind-of helped me.

This really does make me angry. I, you know, struggled with whether I should have come to the hearing, because I am so angry, which is not healthy. You know, as my coach said, the best players don't get angry.

But I need to ask the question to Mr. Cox. Can you tell me the people who stand between me getting on a plane every week—I average 1,800 miles a week flying—what stands between me and somebody bringing some kind of explosive on a plane?

Mr. COX. The only person standing between that is the TSA agent who is screening that passenger and that luggage and the baggage that is going on that plane. That is the only one that is doing it.

Mr. CLEAVER. That is weird, because the people who drive people to the airport make more than the TSA people. People who take people away from the airport make more. The people who serve hamburgers make more. I don't care if—that is bass-ackwards. I mean, it is—I mean, Americans ought to be furious at what is going on. We pay these people almost nothing to save our lives every day. It bothers me.

So, you know, we are talking about transferring \$232 million to build a wall, which people laugh about. What I need to also know—maybe, Mr. Neal, you can answer this—this question for me. What should we do to make sure they earn more money, other than not spend \$232 million or not to take any money from their budget and use it toward salaries? What should we do?

Mr. NEAL. The quickest thing that could be done would be appropriating more labor dollars that are targeted specifically to TSO pay increases and make them base pay increases, using the ATSA flexibilities of—TSA got that money on October 1, and beginning the fiscal year, they could start paying people more money in October. So that would be the quickest way to get money in TSOs' hands.

Mr. CLEAVER. But if we have—you know, we are contemplating taking \$64 million from the compensation fund. I don't understand, why couldn't the \$64 million already be moved toward compensation?

Mr. NEAL. I—virtually any money they have that is the right color of money can be put in TSO compensation. You know, I don't know exactly which dollars they have available right now, and I am not familiar with where they are wanting to move money for border issues. That is totally outside the purview of my panel.

Mr. CLEAVER. OK.

Mr. NEAL. All I can see on that is what I read on the—in the news.

Mr. CLEAVER. Oh, so you are saying you probably don't believe what these newspapers are reporting?

Mr. NEAL. Didn't say that. I said all I know is what I read in the news with respect to where they are moving money.

Mr. CLEAVER. OK. I represent Kansas City, Missouri. We are one of only 2 airports in the country, as probably Mr. Cox knows, where the TSOs are private. They are not a part of the regular TSA operation, Kansas City and San Francisco, and about 20 other smaller airports around the country.

You know, I actually know people by names. They are not just the TSO. I know their names. One young lady that I—I remember the morning she was born, Ebony. So when I see them getting up before daylight going all the way out to the Kansas City International Airport and realizing that they are not being compensated, it just drives me crazy, and knowing how important the job is.

My time has run out. I can do about 30 more minutes on this, but my time runs out.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Cleaver.

Seeing no other Members, we are going to move to a second round of questions. If I can, I will recognize myself for first round of questions.

So I am listening to everybody on the panel, and everybody here on this dais, we all agree that something has to be done to give better pay to these individuals who are essentially underpaid; therefore, we have massive turnover.

Mr. Cleaver was saying he flies 1,800 miles a week. I fly 6,000 miles a week. All of us, though, agree that those are high-value assets in the sky in this country every day. As I think about the pay, I am going to ask, how do we move forward? What is it mechanically that we need to do? What is the next step here to move in that direction of equitable pay? I am not talking equitable pay just for the sake of equity, but reducing that turnover.

Open it up for comments from the panelists.

Mr. COX. Put them on the GS pay scale. It is a proven pay scale that is working for all other Federal employees. There is flexibilities in that GS pay scale. There is locality pay. There is other specialty pays that can be put on top of that for high-cost areas. That is how it is working for all other Federal employees. Why are these people that keep us safe since 9/11 and done such a good job so lowly paid?

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Neal.

Mr. NEAL. Sir, actually about three-quarters of Federal employees are paid through the General Schedule. About a quarter are paid in other pay systems. So as President Cox said, there are locality allowances, there are retention allowances, there are things

you can do with the General Schedule. Many of them take a long time. Getting special salary rates approved for a particular location can take OPM a year or 2 or 3 years. So it is a very cumbersome pay process.

During every Presidential transition for the last dozen years or so, the Partnership for Public Service, the National Academy of Public Administration, the Senior Executives Association, other good Government organizations have recommended modernizing civil service pay.

TSO pay is a significant problem. There are other Federal employees whose pay is suffering as well because the General Schedule is not adequate to meet the needs.

Mr. CORREA. But I would say, Mr. Neal, given what these employees do, keeping us safe—we can talk about the border, the refugee crisis, major issue, no doubt. We can debate how to address that issue. But I will tell you, what we are guarding against at airports is individuals who have a goal and intent of bringing down one of our planes. Apples to oranges here.

We have to make sure that these individuals are paid correctly so the turnover goes down so that we can remain safe, so to speak, on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Kelly, very quickly, couple of words on that.

Mr. KELLY. Well, TSA has a finite amount of money to spend on all of its operations. We have issued some reports recently that have identified hundreds of millions of dollars that are not necessarily being spent as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Mr. CORREA. So you are talking about reallocation?

Mr. KELLY. Yes.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Lyttle.

Mr. LYTTLE. I think the locality adjustment is extremely important, and we have to look at what is happening in specific regions.

The turnover in our region, in Denver and Nashville, is extremely high. The economy is really booming in the Puget Sound region, and it is extremely competitive there. We have to pay the TSOs a competitive rate so we can attract and retain them.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you very much.

With that, I yield the remainder of my time. I will turn over and recognize Ranking Member Mrs. Lesko for 5 minutes of questions.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What I have heard today from, I think, all of the panelists is that there is obviously a retention issue. Pay is one of the key factors.

I want to say to any TSO that is watching, I do thank you for your service because you are protecting our Nation. So I know—I am old enough to know that pay is part of the satisfaction of someone's work, but also serving a greater purpose is also part of satisfaction. They are serving a greater purpose of securing our Nation and our airports.

What I heard Mr. Neal say—and again, correct me if I am wrong—is that in some markets, TSOs are getting paid a decent amount, and in other markets where competitive pay is higher, they are not. That if you move to a Title 5 type of pay system that is old, antiquated, inflexible, so you could end up actually harming more than—than the status quo, in that some areas you need higher pay; other areas, because of the market influence, you know, you

can get by with a lower pay. It just depends on what area of the country that you are in.

One of the things that Mr. Neal brought up is that there is a—I think you said 9 months delay between the time a TSO applies for a job and when they actually get hired. Why does it take so long?

Mr. NEAL. It is a very lengthy process. It is many steps that includes computer-based training, it includes interviews, it includes a medical exam, includes a background investigation. All of those things take a very long time. The amount of time that TSA takes to do that, 270 days, you could give birth to a new employee in 270 days. It is far too long. We believe there are a number of actions they could take that could shorten that time considerably.

It makes an enormous—it puts an enormous burden on an applicant who is wanting to be a TSO if they put in a job application and they don't hear anything on it and don't actually start work for 9 months. You tend to see lots of people just drop out of the process, because they need a job, and they are not going to take another job somewhere else and then just quit that one immediately to take the TSO job.

So that 270 days is an enormous problem, and we do believe it could be shortened considerably.

Mrs. LESKO. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly, was that part of your recommendation, to decrease the amount of time between application and actually getting hired?

Mr. KELLY. We did recommend that they improve their hiring process, yes.

Mrs. LESKO. OK. Do you know if Administrator Pekoske is carrying out on any of these—that particular recommendation?

Mr. KELLY. They have concurred with all of our recommendations.

Mrs. LESKO. OK. All right. Well, hopefully if he is listening, they will work on that. Because I agree with you, it is kind-of crazy, if somebody needs a job, they are not going to want to wait 9 months, unless they are just independently wealthy or something and can live 9 months without pay, which I highly doubt.

But in any case, I just want to make a last statement regarding the border security because that has come up. It is of concern to move TSA employees to the border, even though they did so voluntarily, is my understanding. But it just goes to show what a crisis we have down at the border. I mean, I have talked about this before. I am from Arizona, and so we see first-hand the border crisis that is coming before us.

In fact, Yuma, Arizona, mayor texted me on my phone saying, OK, we have X number of people in our detention, you know, areas or charities, and we—we don't have enough capacity and that type of thing.

So I have been on record before, as we need to get together, Democrats and Republicans, to try to do some immigration reform. I also think right now, because it is an emergency situation, they need more funding so we can deal with this humanitarian and security crisis there. Hopefully, then, we wouldn't have to bring TSAs over to the border.

With that, I will yield back my time.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mrs. Lesko.

I now recognize the Chairman, Mr. Thompson, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Not only are we moving TSOs out of TSA, but we have two VIPR teams scheduled to go to the border, we have Federal air marshals scheduled to go to the border, as well as other TSA employees. If they are so valuable, why can we spare them to leave that valuable mission and go to the border?

We have some 5,000 vacancies within CBP and other agencies along the border right now that have been vacant for quite a while. Nobody comes and says to us, we need to hire these 5,000 people. Every time CBP or anybody has ever come to this committee and asked for help, we have been gracious. I think what I see now is the continuing manufacturing of a crisis to the detriment of TSA and some other agencies, which should not be.

My challenge too, if I am good enough to be the lowest-paid employee in TSA but you are going to send me to the border working a higher-paid job, but you are going to pay me what I am making at the airport, something's wrong with that. You could pay me at the airport.

That is my concern, is our rules allow us, if the TSA administrator will request an increase in pay in any of the supplementals or anything that come before Congress, I don't think anybody would turn it down. But we don't get the request. So it is not Congress not giving more money; it is the Department not requesting money for these workers that they say they love and appreciate and—and all of that.

So I am as concerned about it, the pay, but I am more concerned that now we are putting airports at risk, potentially, as well as the traveling public in general by taking people away from airports and sending them to the border.

Mr. Cox said he has not seen any strategy or not been consulted with his over 40,000 members, what they will be doing if they volunteer. I thank them for their volunteering. But you have to have a plan.

I am not aware of any Member of Congress who has received anything in writing or a briefing from the Department as to what they propose to do along the border with these reassigned employees. So it is difficult to support something when you don't know what it is.

I yield back.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you.

I now recognize Mrs. Demings for questions, should she have any.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am not sure I have one. One thing I do know is that we have got to bring some sanity back into this discussion.

Our airports, our ports of entry, the safety of the traveling public—46 million of them traveled through the Orlando International Airport last year—the safety of the traveling public has to be a top priority. Robbing Peter to pay Paul, to take officers from our ports of entry to transfer them down to the Southern Border—we had the Secretary of Homeland Security here a short while ago, and I

asked her about violent incidents at the border where CBP officers had been injured severely. She did not have the number. I would think if we had a crisis at the border to the extent that we keep hearing, she would know those numbers. So I then tried to make it easier by saying, well, how many Customs and Border Patrol officers have been killed in the line of duty. She first said 20 and then she said zero.

We know at our ports of entry overwhelming number of narcotics come through our ports of entry. We know we have had very volatile, deadly situations at our ports of entry. So, yeah, we need to secure our borders. But you don't take from the most vulnerable areas or ports of entry in order to do that.

So I just think we—you know, the talking points are wonderful, but we need to be really serious about our needs in terms of securing this Nation and particularly at our ports of entry. So I just had to say that.

Back to Mr. Kelly. You talked about—we have heard about 9 months that it takes—and even that. If it takes 9 months before an officer is ready for duty, we are going to further strain the workforce by sending them to the border. That just doesn't make any sense to me, and that is just this Member talking.

Mr. Kelly, you talked about some recommendations that were made—and forgive me if you have already kind-of talked about how retention and recommendations that were made to improve on that process, but you also made some recommendations in terms of training, addressing some training issues.

Mr. KELLY. That is correct.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Could you share with me how you kind-of prioritized those recommendations to the TSA?

Mr. KELLY. We didn't prioritize them. We made 9 recommendations. We thought they were all important to be implemented, and we expect all of those 9 recommendations to be implemented.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. Do you know where we are in that process, in terms of implementation?

Mr. KELLY. Three of the recommendations TSA has implemented, so they are closed.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Which ones are those? Do you—

Mr. KELLY. I can also tell, but I can't tell you right now.

Mrs. DEMINGS. But 3 have been implemented?

Mr. KELLY. Three have been implemented, and we have closed them. The remaining 6 have been resolved, which means that TSA has recommended—or given us actions that they plan on taking that we believe address our concerns but have not yet been implemented.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK.

Mr. KELLY. So they have a plan to implement the other 6 that they have not closed.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mrs. Demings.

Any further questions, thoughts, comments?

I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony today and all of the Members here for their most important questions.

Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask that you respond to such expeditiously and in writing.

Without objection, this committee record shall be kept open for 10 days.

Hearing no further business, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:24 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

