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Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

“TSA Oversight Part 2 - Airport Perimeter Security”
Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations

July 13, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of our witnesses today.

I want to take a moment today to talk about Delvonte Tisdale, a 16 year-old boy who had just moved with his family to the Charlotte area so he could join the Air Force ROTC program at North Mecklenburg High School. Unfortunately, on November 15, 2010, his body was found on the side of the road in the quiet Boston suburb of Milton, Massachusetts.

After significant investigation, police determined that Mr. Tisdale had breached security at Charlotte Douglas Airport and climbed into the wheel well of a 737 plane headed for Boston. Due to the extreme cold and thin air at cruising altitude, Mr. Tisdale likely froze to death before his body fell out of the plane during its decent into Boston.

This tragedy is due in part to security failings at the airport where Mr. Tisdale was able to gain entry to secure areas and climb into the wheel well of the plane. It is incumbent upon us to understand why this happened and how this happened. Clearly, if this young man could breach security, so could someone with much more hostile motives.

As we examine this issue, I ask that we resist the temptation to turn this into a blame session, especially when it comes to an issue as important as airport security and the loss of a young life. Let's take an honest look at the security lapses that allowed Mr. Tisdale to crawl into the wheel well of that plane. Let's be clear about what security measures TSA was responsible for, under the law, and what security measures Charlotte Douglas Airport was responsible for, under the law, and see how we can help improve airport security around the country. The American people deserve that.

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