CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL MODEL CONGRESS CONFERENCE 2018
HOUSE – HOMELAND SECURITY

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Dear Model Congress delegates,

Welcome to the Centennial Model Congress of 2018! This year, the House Homeland Security committee members will discuss a very polarizing issue of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Before pondering about the controversies around this matter at hand, let us introduce the chairs of this committee.

The House Homeland Security committee will be chaired by Bryce Plunkett, and Co-Chaired by Annie Liu. This is Bryce's fourth year of Model Congress, and he is the President of the Centennial Model Congress club. Last year, he coordinated CHSMC. Some interests of his include: coding, history, and trivia.

This is Annie's second year of Model Congress, and she is the Member-at-Large of the Centennial Model Congress Club. She is interested in STEM, domestic and international environmental issues, and advocating for cancer awareness.

Even though it's our first year chairing the House Homeland Security, the committee has been part of CHSMC for the past three years. We will discuss the Transportation Security Administration this year. The topic (and the agency) is very polarizing. You either love it, or you hate it. Most committees would tell you to disregard your personal experiences while assuming the role of a Representative.

However, the topic is not like most topics. Thus, we ask you to embrace your own personal experiences while also referring to hard evidence in the background and other sources. In committee, you should assume the role and personality of the Representative you have been assigned--you do not need to adhere to this rule perfectly but please do try.

If you have any questions, please email us at centennialmodelcongress@gmail.com

Sincerely,
Bryce Plunkett
CHSMC 2018 Homeland Security Chair

Annie Liu
CHSMC 2018 Homeland Security Co-Chair

Founding of TSA

Two months after World Trade Center attacks, President George W. Bush signed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) on November 19, 2001. This act created the Transportation Security Administration to "oversee security in all modes of transportation" along with several significant security policies. It required federal officials to conduct all transportation screenings (on all checked bags). It also expanded the Federal Air Marshal Service and mandated the reinforcement of cockpit doors.

Because politicians and the public were not satisfied with existing anti-terrorism efforts, many supported the Homeland Security Act. The bill, which passed exactly a year after the ATSA, created the Department of Homeland Security. In essence, it centralized "public security" agencies under one cabinet department. These agencies included (but are not limited to): the Secret Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, the Coast Guard, and the Transportation Security Administration.

A Brief History of TSA Policies - Aviation

On December 22, 2001, Richard Reid boarded a flight from Paris to Miami. Passengers subdued him after he attempted to light a fuse in his shoes mid flight; two doctors onboard sedated him until they reached the United States, where he was detained.

As the passengers suspected, Reid's shoes were found to contain explosives that he managed to get past de Gaulle airport security. Aviation security experts and the American public believed this incident highlighted the continuing existence of holes in aviation security. It is important to note, though, that de Gaulle is a French airport and the policy of screening all checked bags was not supposed to be instituted by American airports until mid-January.

Nevertheless, the TSA, still in its infancy, created a new policy: passengers must remove their shoes when going through security checkpoints. Most aviation-goers fully supported this policy. One individual went as far as saying "I would take off my clothes if I have to."

About a year later (in 2002), the American aviation sector met two key mandates of the ATSA. Cockpit doors of all commercial planes were reinforced, and security checkpoints implemented explosive detection systems to screen all bags. Congress passed the Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act around that same time; it created the Federal Flight Deck Officer program (FFDO). The FFDO trains commercial pilots who join the program--if they pass the psychological test and criminal background checks--to use weapons in the cockpit and equips them with a "TSA-approved firearm." (The program was not controversial based on articles from the time period).

Sometime in 2006, the United Kingdom uncovered a complex plan known as the "Liquid Bomb Plot." The terrorists who created the scheme planned to blow-up transatlantic flights by assembling the explosive on the plane-a majority of the explosive's ingredients would be stored in soft drink bottles in order to allude security.
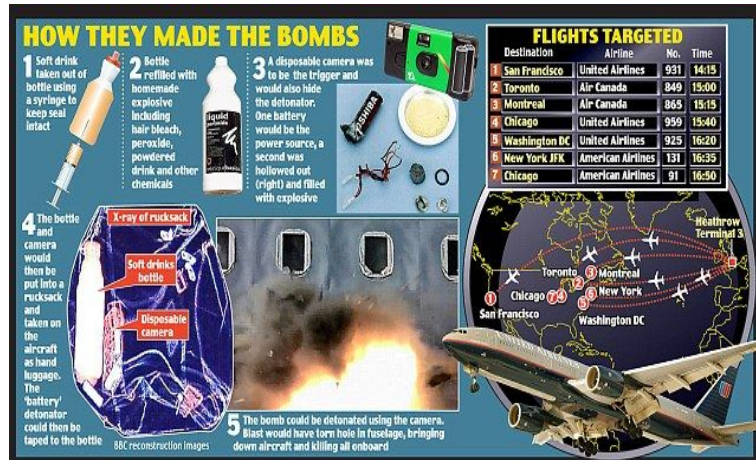
The reaction by United Kingdom aviation security was extreme. Passengers were prohibited from bringing anything more than purse or wallet into the aircraft cabin, and liquids were banned entirely. In fact, one could not even bring a pen on a plane because it contained liquid ink. The ban had one exception: formula milk; mothers still had to prove it was not explosives by tasting it. Like the United Kingdom, the United States also took extreme action: the TSA banned all liquids.

Naturally, most people did not respond positively to these new draconian rules. As a result, the TSA amended its policy, allowing liquids, gels, and aerosols in 3.4 ounce (max) containers that are placed in a single resealable, 1-quart plastic bag. This amendment did little to quell the public's ire, who still viewed the rule as extreme. The TSA (aviation security groups for other countries) argued that the measure was temporary until a technology to efficiently screen liquids for explosives could be implemented. Over a decade later, the rule persists at all American airports.

For the next three years (2006-2009), the only significant TSA policy to emerge involved canine teams screening all cargo on passengers United States passenger planes--it was expanded to include passenger and baggage screening (not all passengers and bags).

Then, on Christmas day of 2009, another terrorist incident occurred on an international flight bound for the United States. A Nigerian student after visiting Yemen for a significant time snuck an explosive device on a plane headed from Amsterdam to Detroit. The explosive device contained twice as much explosive material as the shoe bomber but was also hidden in apparel: the man's underwear. Although the explosive failed to detonate, the attempted attack highlighted several flaws in aviation security. First, security checkpoints failed to detect the massive amount of explosives on the man's person. Second, he had been placed on a United Kingdom terror watch list, yet he managed to board the plane. And third, his father had reported him as a religious extremist to CIA agents in Nigeria, but he was not added to the FBI's "Terrorist Screening Database."

Because the bomber managed to get a large amount of explosives through traditional metal detectors, the TSA most likely expedited the installation of "Advanced Imaging Technology" Advanced Imaging Technology refers to full body scanners that can detect objects underneath clothing. The TSA allocated 2.1 billion dollars to a full body scanner program between 2008-2017.

Several years later, in 2012, another Yemen-based bomb plot was unfoiled. The CIA "thwarted a plot by al-Qaida's affiliate in Yemen to destroy a US-bound airliner using a bomb with a new design around the one-year anniversary of the killing of Osama bin Laden." This new design, however, was just an improved version of the 2009 underwear bomb. The FBI stated that the bomb most likely would have passed through traditional metal detectors, but they were not sure if it could (or couldn't) pass through full body scanners.

From then until now, the TSA created only a few major policies. The most significant action of which was the initialization of their "Pre-Check Program," which accelerates the security screening process for passengers; one might view the policy as an attempt at better public relations. The other significant change involved tightening their "personal electronics" procedures: in July 2017, they mandated that all personal electronics larger than a cell phone be placed in their own individual bins. The same policy but with only laptops had been in place for several years prior. It has most likely increased passengers' waits at security checkpoints because passengers now need to have more items "individually" scanned.

Full Body Scanner Controversy
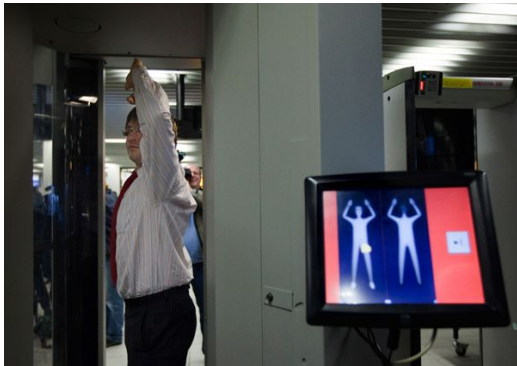
Due to privacy issues, these full body scanners have caused significant controversy. One particular type of full body scanner (made by Rapiscan Systems) that used "backscatter technology" was especially controversial because it produced highly-realistic images of passengers described by critics as "virtual strip searches." Thus, the TSA created privacy protection regulations. For example, the agent who viewed the image would never see the passenger.

The protections did not allay the public's fear. Therefore, Congress mandated that all full body scanners produce only "generic images" of passengers. Rapiscan Systems could not meet the deadline to integrate the privacy policy into their backscatter scanners' software. Because of this, the TSA terminated their five million dollar contract with Rapiscan Systems' software unit and decided to gradually phase

out the machines from all American airports. Nonetheless, the TSA decided to continue using body scanners from other companies that could meet the regulation. They also kept installing body scanners in airports and did not change the 2.1 billion dollars allocated towards them.

Even though the TSA did not limit their use of body scanners, they pivoted from backscatter x-ray technology to "millimeter-wave" technology, which instead uses radio waves. Not only did millimeter-wave technology produce less "revealing" images, but it also did not expose the user to high levels of radiation--just one scan from a backscatter body-scanner exposed the user to an amount of radiation equal to 10% of a chest x-ray (a significant amount). Nevertheless, privacy groups continue to challenge the body scanners, and 1% of passengers opt for a "pat down" instead of going through the machine.

Effectiveness of the TSA in Aviation

In 2015, somebody leaked an evaluation conducted by Homeland Security investigators of the TSA's effectiveness in airports. The investigators attempted to sneak fake bombs and weapons through airport security, and in 95% of cases, the TSA did not detect them. Critics claimed it served as evidence of a fundamental flaw in the TSA's ideology and organization. The chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee stated, "After spending over $540 million on baggage and screening equipment and millions more on training, the failure rate today is higher than it was in 2007. Something is not working." In response to the public outcry, Homeland Security reassigned the Acting Deputy Director (highest position) of the TSA , Melvin Carraway, to a completely different job outside the agency.

Surprisingly, two years later, the TSA demonstrated improvement albeit not a huge change. Homeland Security ran the same test again in 2017, and the security checkpoints didn't detect the false weapon or explosive in 70% cases. An improvement of 25% could be viewed as significant (5% to 30% success rate, six times better), however most politicians still viewed the agency's performance as unsatisfactory. Representative Mike Rogers even described the TSA as "broken badly."

A Brief History of TSA Policies - Mass Transit and Trains

TSA works with mass transit systems and companies to keep the 6000 mass transit systems in the US safe. Additionally, TSA safeguards all four general modes of land-based transportation: mass transit, freight rail, highway motor carrier and pipeline and maritime. For mass transit and freight rail, TSA spot checks and sets guidelines regarding security, identity verification, and baggage. In May 2016, TSA commenced Operation RAILSAFE, an antiterrorism and security enforcement operation on high-volume traffic days, but this program has yet to prove its worth. TSA also holds random checks on Amtrak to ensure security, but it is not advised to expect airplane-level security at train and mass transit stations because of the difficulty of hijacking trains. Numerous groups and individuals have called for the abolishment

of the TSA citing that private companies can provide better, more in-depth safety regulation, especially for areas the TSA touches on briefly, such as mass transit.

Partisan Views on the TSA

Using the Democratic and Republican Party's recent platforms to gauge TSA opinions as there is very little reliable and accurate information about their views recently, they disagree on several key stances. As a result, both sides have recently proposed (conflicting) legislation to overhaul or improve the TSA.

Republicans believe in a Homeland Security policy that responds more proactively to threats surrounding America. Specifically, the party platform calls for the privatization or the reformation of the TSA to become more effective in guarding against threats, and calls for less invasive search procedures. For example, Republican senator John Thune proposed a bill, the TSA Modernization Act, in 2017, that's aimed at reforming the TSA to meet current security demands. It is important to also remember that by no means does the republican platform want less airport security.

The Democratic platform mostly supports the TSA and looks for more opportunities to improve its operations. For example, recently in 2017, two Democratic representatives introduced a bill to improve TSA worker rights, and another bill, the Air Cargo Security Legislation, to enhance air cargo security efforts by taking additional steps to ensure the security and effective screening of contents inside. Additionally, the general platform viewpoint also consists of the belief that passenger profiling is discriminatory.

Future Direction

With the ever-growing advancement of technology and turbulence in the current US government, the road ahead for the TSA's growth and development is not always clear. Some notable groups and individuals such as Forbes magazine and Senator Rand Paul are pushing for the abolishment of the TSA, citing that privately-contracted companies can provide better security and scanning services at a better quality. The TSA is additionally looking for ways to speed up their aviation services while maintaining security. TSA spokespeople have discussed new TSA guidelines for 2018, including requiring passengers to remove their electronics before scanning, and increasing manual screening. They are also looking forward to releasing new software for more streamlined experiences. The debate over abolishing the TSA has yet to be widely publicized. Whatever it maybe, we can only hope that the TSA is doing a good job as our safety depends on their actions greatly!

Questions to Consider
1. Should the TSA be completely overhauled?
2. Should the TSA be completely disbanded?

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