

# United States Senate

March 13, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly:

As the White House works to finalize the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018, the public is reading about possible reductions in funding to various important federal programs and agencies. I am particularly concerned with early press reports that identify an 11 percent reduction to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) budget, which is important to the confidence of our traveling public, and improves our overall security.<sup>1</sup> Because of the impact that these cuts could have on our national security, tourism industry, and Nevada's economy, I urge you to work with the White House to convince the President to abandon these ill-advised cuts.

Every day, TSA is responsible for ensuring the security of approximately two million passengers traveling aboard of over 22,000 international flights and domestic flights.<sup>2</sup> The screening that agents provide is integral in maintaining passenger trust and confidence in traveling safety, and it is an important stopgap in preventing acts of violence. The proposed budget cuts to TSA airport security will not only threaten our national security, but also could increase wait times that can harm our nation's traveling economy. Failing to provide TSA with adequate resources to perform security screenings efficiently will undoubtedly have adverse effects on travelers.<sup>3</sup> At Chicago O'Hare International Airport last year, more than 3,800 passengers missed their flights over a four month period due to long security lines that stretched as long as two hours.<sup>4</sup> A survey conducted by the U.S. Travel Association in May 2016 concluded that long airport security lines caused 21.8 percent of American travelers to "travel by other means or delay or cancel their trips because of saturation coverage of hours-long waits at airport security checkpoints."<sup>5</sup> Air travelers need assurance that they are moving through a safe and efficient transportation system, and that includes a properly funded TSA.

Maintaining consumer confidence in air security and travel is essential to Nevada's economy. In 2016 alone, McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas had more than 47 million travelers, many of whom were visiting Nevada from out of state.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, if the proposed budget cuts are implemented and airport security wait times increase, it could have a dramatic

<sup>1</sup> Politico, "[Trump plan pays for immigration crackdown with cuts to coastal, air security.](#)" March 6, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> TSA, [Fact Sheet](#)

<sup>3</sup> Chicago Tribune, "[At Chicago airports, wait times in TSA lines are 10 minutes or less.](#)" August, 23, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Time, "[Chicago O'Hare Airport Warns Travelers to Arrive 3 Hours Before Flights.](#)" May 17, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Travel Association Press Release, [Study: Long TSA Lines Will Ground One in Five Flyers](#), May 25, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Clark County Department of Aviation Press Release, [McCarran Served 47.4 Million Passengers in 2016](#), January, 26, 2017.

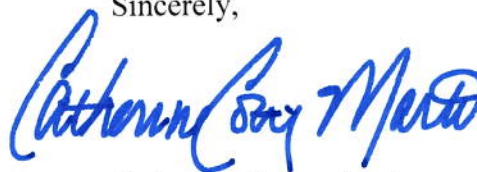
and adverse impact on travel to Nevada, which adds \$18.5 billion to the state's GDP and supports up to 487,500 Nevada jobs.<sup>7</sup>

Specifically, I would like to know the potential safety and national security impacts that would result from cutting funding by as much as \$500 million, namely to areas of behavioral detection officers and local law enforcement funding, which your Administration is reportedly considering. The overall impact of cuts this size would have a detrimental effect on the agency's ability to fulfill its core mission to "protect the nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce."<sup>8</sup> Please send me the expected impact of these cuts to individual airports and staffing efforts under this anticipated reduction in federal funds.

Further, diverting funds from the TSA to construct a wall along the southern border is an inefficient use of taxpayer money. My understanding is that your agency still has not even completed the cost-benefit analysis of the border wall.<sup>9</sup> Whereas, we already know that TSA agents screen almost double the number of people every day than that of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, and building a wall will do nothing to improve our national security. Instead, I urge you to do everything in your power as Secretary to fight to retain appropriate levels of funding for TSA. Such funds will not only strengthen our national security and uphold consumer confidence in travel, but also help ensure that Nevada's economy remains strong.

I appreciate your attention to this critically important issue.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>7</sup> Nevada Division of Tourism, Nevada Travel Economic Impacts Calendar Years 2015 – 2010, August 2016.

<sup>8</sup> TSA, TSA Mission

<sup>9</sup> Politico, EMPLOYMENT & IMMIGRATION WHITEBOARD. March 8, 2017