



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo Questions F.b.I. Expert About Potential Vulnerabilities of Aircraft Operating Systems During Senate Cyber Security Hearing

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR June 9, 2015

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Joint Hearing Focuses on Steps New York State Can Take To Improve Cyber Security and Combat Cyber Terrorism

Queens, NY (June 9, 2015): NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. recently participated in an Albany hearing that was called to examine strategies New York State might undertake to better protect sensitive state computer information from cyber attacks and the potential misuse of this data. Noting that he represents a Senate district that is adjacent to JFK airport and close to LaGuardia, Addabbo also took the opportunity at the hearing to question expert witnesses about the potential for cyber criminals to hack into aircraft operating systems.

The hearing – a joint effort of the Senate Committees on Codes, Consumer Protection, and Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs – invited public comment on four pieces of cyber security legislation recently approved by the State Senate with Addabbo's support. The bills (S.3404, S.3405, S.3406, and S.3407) seek to strengthen New York's criminal law to better recognize cyber terrorism; increase penalties for computer crimes designed to cause financial harm to others; require a comprehensive cyber security review by state agencies;

and create a state cyber security information sharing program, modeled on a federal initiative, to better coordinate public and private sector responses to cyber threats.

“Between December, 2000 and January, 2015, the estimated number of Internet users has grown from about 361 million to more than 7.2 billion, a more than 740 percent increase,” said Addabbo, the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs. “While access to the Internet and rapid information technology advances across the board have provided many positive benefits for all of us, there is also a very dark side to this progress where criminals can use computer technology to steal money and identities, disrupt the operations of government and commerce, and cause other serious and sometimes grievous harm to others. We need to be as prepared as possible to address and prevent possible threats and vulnerabilities.”

In light of recent news reports about a purported cyber security expert hacking into airplane entertainment systems and altering the aircraft’s operations, Addabbo questioned Special Agent Donald W. Freese, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Cyber Investigative Joint Task Force, about the issue. While Director Freese acknowledged that the growing use of information technology leads to a growth in these and other types of risks, he expressed confidence that the vulnerabilities are low for this kind of aircraft tampering. Freese credited this to the ongoing work of Federal Aviation Administration regulators, safeguards being implemented by aircraft manufacturers, extensive testing protocols to determine whether a system is “hackable,” and the fact that the required use of two co-pilots on United States airplanes ensures real-time, human monitoring of potential malfunctions.

“With two airports in Queens, I was glad to hear that these risks are not considered top-priority threats right now, but I am pleased that the FBI and other cyber security agencies

are aware of the claims and are investigating,” Addabbo said. “In the wake of September 11th, 2001, we remember all too well the indescribable devastation that can occur when aircraft are used as weapons.”

Other expert witnesses at the hearing included Dr. Peter Bloniarz, the Executive Director of the NYS Cyber Security Advisory Board; Richard Dewey, the Executive Vice-President of the New York Independent System Operator, which oversees the state’s electrical utility system; and Jamie Brown, Director of Global Relations for CA Technologies, who spoke about utility infrastructure threats.

The four cyber security bills, having passed the State Senate, are now under consideration by the State Assembly Committees on Codes and Governmental Operations.

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To view the hearing, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHoVZu8nEjA>

Senator Addabbo speaks to Special Agent Freese at the 1:02 hour mark.