



**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**Don Young**  
Chairman

**James L. Oberstar**  
Ranking Democratic Member

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Lloyd A. Jones, Chief of Staff  
Elizabeth Megginson, Chief Counsel

David Heymfeld, Democratic Chief of Staff

The Honorable Edmund S. Hawley  
Assistant Secretary  
Transportation Security Administration (TSA)  
East Building South 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Arlington, Virginia 22202

Dear Assistant Secretary Hawley:

As a member of the *President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism*, which investigated the Pan Am103 tragedy ("Pan Am 103 Commission") in 1989-1990, I have had a long-standing interest in ensuring that the U.S. has the best possible airline checked baggage security. Therefore, I strongly supported the Congressional mandate to electronically screen all checked baggage in the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA, P.L. 107-71), which Congress approved after September 11, 2001.

In November 2003, I wrote the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and requested that it review the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) overall management of checked baggage screening and ascertain the agency's ability to electronically screen all checked baggage. At the time, I was concerned that the size of the TSA's screener workforce (limited to 45,000 full-time equivalents (FTE) by an arbitrary cap) coupled with rebounding passenger traffic could cause disruptions in the full utilization of explosive detection equipment.

In response to my request, GAO recently issued its report *TSA Management of Checked Baggage Screening Procedures Could Be Improved* (GAO-06-291SU). GAO reported that while it is TSA's policy to use standard explosive detection system (EDS) and explosive trace detection (ETD) screening procedures whenever possible because these procedures provide the most effective detection of explosives, TSA also allows alternative screening procedures in certain circumstances.

GAO further reported that TSA's use of alternative screening procedures has involved trade-offs in security effectiveness. Moreover, according to TSA data, the use of alternative screening procedures will increase at some airports because of rising passenger traffic. TSA currently screens 522 million bags per year. GAO reports that TSA could be screening as many as 96 million more bags than it now screens – an 18% increase - by as early as 2010.

In light of GAO's recent report, it is very clear to me that TSA will either need more screeners or more efficient EDS systems to meet anticipated passenger traffic. In the meantime, I strongly suggest that TSA implement GAO's recommendations, specifically that TSA:

- Use Performance Management Information System (PMIS) data on the use of alternative screening procedures in determining at which airports to conduct covert testing;
- Conduct local covert testing of alternative screening procedures to determine whether checked baggage screeners can detect simulated improvised explosives when using these procedures;
- Strengthen the monitoring and tracking of the use of alternative screening procedures to help determine the progress the agency is making in minimizing its need to use these procedures;
- Develop performance measures and performance targets for the use of alternative screening procedures in checked baggage screening.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Giles Giovinazzi on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-9161.

Sincerely,

  
James L. Oberstar  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure