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House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure DEMOCRATS

For Immediate Release Tuesday, April 26, 2005

Attn: National Desk, Transportation, Aviation, Homeland Security

T&I Dems Introduce Bill to Improve Airport Security Screening Technology

WASHINGTON—Senior Democrats on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee today introduced legislation to expedite the deployment of new equipment to screen checked baggage and passengers at airports.

Reps. James L. Oberstar (Minn.), Jerry F. Costello (Ill.), and Peter A. DeFazio (Ore.) offered the bill in response to recent reports from the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General. Both the Inspector General and the Transportation Security Administration have indicated that a significant improvement in screener performance may not be possible without a stepped up effort to install new screening technologies.

Oberstar, Ranking Democratic Member of the full Committee, said travelers are more secure than before the 9/11 attacks in 2001, but airport screeners are still not detecting some prohibited items concealed on passengers and in checked baggage. He said the reason is that the government has not provided the screeners with adequate staffing levels and equipment to perform their jobs.

"Our screening system is failing us because this Congress and this Administration are failing both the screeners and the American traveling public," Oberstar said. "This Congress has arbitrarily capped the number of airport screeners at 45,000, and has provided neither the resources nor the technology for the screeners to get the job done. It is a failure of leadership and there are no more excuses."

"We believe it is very clear that the federal government needs to make the necessary investments in technology to enhance screener performance," said Costello, Ranking Democrat on the Aviation Subcommittee. "We cannot continue to hope for security improvements when the infrastructure is not in place to achieve them."

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"Screeners can only do so much with the ancient technology they are forced to work with," said DeFazio, a senior Member of the Aviation Subcommittee and a Member of the Committee on Homeland Security. "It's time we give screeners 21st Century tools to combat 21st Century threats."

Oberstar, Costello, and DeFazio pointed out that last year, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the 9/11 Commission) specifically recommended that the Transportation Security Administration and the Congress "give priority attention to improving the ability of screeners at checkpoints to detect explosives on passengers." The resulting *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* (P.L. 108-458) authorized \$250 million for the research and deployment of advanced passenger screening technologies, such as trace portals and backscatter x-ray systems. To date, however, only about \$30 million has been appropriated specifically for the general deployment of these types of technologies.

The Airport Screener Technology Improvement Act of 2005 dedicates \$650 million currently collected in airport security fees to the Aviation Security Capital Fund for the installation of in-line screening systems for checked bags, and creates a Checkpoint Screening Security Fund to provide the \$250 million already authorized for the deployment of new passenger screening equipment at security checkpoints.

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