NEWS

Attn. National Desk: Transportation, Aviation, Homeland Security

Oberstar: Registered Traveler Program Will Help Speed Airport Security
TSA begins pilot program for frequent fliers at MSP

WASHINGTON—The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) today begins a test program aimed at speeding up passenger screening at airports and the Ranking Democratic Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has volunteered to be part of the experiment.

Rep. James L. Oberstar (Minn.) signed up for the Registered Traveler pilot project, which gets underway at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) today. Under the program, frequent fliers undergo voluntary background checks and verify their identity using fingerprints and a biometric eye scan. Once registered, these travelers are allowed to use a designated screening lane and will still have to pass through metal detectors and have their bags x-rayed, but they will be excused from secondary screenings, moving them through the process more quickly and making the security line move faster for all travelers.

"I've enrolled in order to be part of this grand experiment, to experience firsthand the effectiveness as well as any potential trouble spots, or shortcomings of the program," Oberstar said. "I would like it to succeed. I caution, however, that protection of privacy will be the earliest bellwether of that success."

Although the pilot program is limited to Minneapolis-St. Paul for now, TSA plans to expand it to airports in Houston, Los Angeles, Boston and Washington, D.C., by the end of summer. Based on the results of the 90-day trial period at these airports, TSA could eventually implement it nation-wide.

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"This is an ambitious undertaking: 70 million frequent travelers, potentially, to be pre-screened, background-checked, biometrically enrolled, with a finger-print, retina-scan baseline, and given an unalterable ID," Oberstar said. "This program will help speed up the screening process, without bypassing it, and will give substance to Secretary Mineta's call for 'world-class security, with world-class service.'"

TSA is working with Northwest Airlines, the principal carrier at MSP, to register the airline's highest mileage fliers. Oberstar was eligible to enroll because of his frequent travel on the airline.

"Northwest Airlines has been an early and strong advocate of a registered traveler program, as well as a thoughtful architect of the structure of such a program. Northwest's participation will make a highly valuable contribution to what all of us hope to be its ultimate success," Oberstar said.

Oberstar said he hopes that TSA will work to develop a similar program to allow occasional travelers, not just frequent fliers, expedite the screening process at airports.

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