

EDOLPHUS TOWNS, NEW YORK,
CHAIRMAN

PAUL E. KANJORSKI, PENNSYLVANIA
CAROLYN B. MALONEY, NEW YORK
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, MARYLAND
DENNIS J. KUCINICH, OHIO
JOHN F. TIERNEY, MASSACHUSETTS
WM. LACY CLAY, MISSOURI
DIANE E. WATSON, CALIFORNIA
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, MASSACHUSETTS
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, VIRGINIA
MIKE QUIGLEY, ILLINOIS
MARCY KAPTUR, OHIO
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PATRICK J. KENNEDY, RHODE ISLAND
DANNY K. DAVIS, ILLINOIS
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND
HENRY CUELLAR, TEXAS
PAUL W. HODES, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
PETER WELCH, VERMONT
BILL FOSTER, ILLINOIS
JACKIE SPEIER, CALIFORNIA
STEVE DRIEHAUS, OHIO
JUDY CHU, CALIFORNIA

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
FACSIMILE (202) 225-4784
MINORITY (202) 225-5074

www.oversight.house.gov

DARRELL E. ISSA, CALIFORNIA,
RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

DAN BURTON, INDIANA
JOHN L. MICA, FLORIDA
MARK E. SOUDER, INDIANA
JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., TENNESSEE
MICHAEL R. TURNER, OHIO
LYNN A. WESTMORELAND, GEORGIA
PATRICK T. McHENRY, NORTH CAROLINA
BRIAN P. BILBRAY, CALIFORNIA
JIM JORDAN, OHIO
JEFF FLAKE, ARIZONA
JEFF FORTENBERRY, NEBRASKA
JASON CHAFFETZ, UTAH
AARON SCHOCK, ILLINOIS
BLAINE LUETKEMEYER, MISSOURI
ANH "JOSEPH" CAO, LOUISIANA

January 6, 2010

The Honorable Darrell Issa
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Issa:

Thank you for your letters requesting that the Committee conduct an investigation and hold hearings related to the recent failed attempted terrorist attack on American aviation. I share your concerns about this incident, and assure you that I am committed to working to resolve the shortcomings in our homeland security system that this incident revealed, so that we may keep Americans safe.

I am encouraged that the Obama Administration is recognizing that the system should have prevented this attack, and has taken immediate action to correct deficiencies, rather than engage in denial or political bluster. I am also encouraged by your endorsement of a strong federal role in preventing terrorist incidents, given that you have previously stated that 9/11 was "simply" a plane crash that should be the responsibility of local authorities.

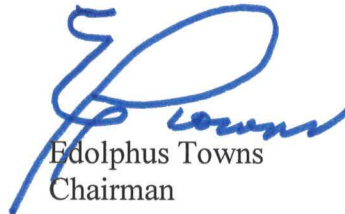
As you note, this Committee held several hearings in the 107th and 108th Congress to improve interagency cooperation in combating terrorism and to create the Department of Homeland Security. At that time, this Committee was in a unique position to oversee the cross-agency issues surrounding homeland security. As you know, however, a key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission was that Congress consolidate oversight of the Department of Homeland Security. The House of Representatives implemented this recommendation by establishing the Committee on Homeland Security as a permanent standing committee of the House. Accordingly, I will coordinate our committee's review of this incident with the Committee on Homeland Security, along with other committees such as the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, to ensure a thorough review without unnecessary duplication that could distract DHS from its important mission.

I fully concur with your observation that information sharing across agencies is a particular problem in homeland security, both historically and in relation to the most recent incident. I am particularly troubled by the lack of integration between the watch lists and no-fly lists maintained by different federal agencies. As an initial step, I have asked the Government Accountability Office to update its prior work on this issue to identify what major changes the federal government has made to address vulnerabilities identified by GAO, the impact of those changes, and what GAO recommendations, if any, have not been fully implemented.

In this session, I am planning a review of two critical homeland security issues that are of particular relevance to this committee due to our legislative jurisdiction – improving cybersecurity in the federal government, and the deployment of secure ID cards under REAL ID and other programs.

I appreciate your offer to join together in “developing an effective and bipartisan oversight strategy” to review our nation’s homeland security policy. I believe the best way to accomplish this is to avoid partisan finger-pointing and leaks to the press, and for us to meet and discuss our shared policy goals.

Sincerely,



Edolphus Towns
Chairman