

The maintenance of our Aviation security systems in the United States is of extreme importance. We are here today to discuss the current status of our security screening equipment that is relied upon at each of our airports as the last line of defense in preventing weapons or explosives to be used to harm the public on our commercial airlines. Madame Chairwoman, I would like to thank you for addressing this very important issue which concerns the safety of so many people each and every day.

In 1988, the world witnessed the devastating affects of terrorism as Pan Am Flight 103 became the target of terrorism that claimed the life of 259 passengers and an additional 11 people on the ground. This tragedy was not the result of a weapon, but a small amount of semtex, an extremely powerful explosive, that was hidden in a cassette recorder packed in a suitcase. For the past twelve years since this accident, the Administration and Congress have changed the focus from guns to explosives to ensure that future tragedies are averted.

Many of the steps that both the Administration and Congress have pursued include: Passage of the Aviation Security Improvement Act (ASIA) of 1990 which required the FAA to begin an accelerated 18-month research and development effort to find an effective explosive detection system (EDS); following the TWA flight 800 disaster, the creation of the Commission on Aviation Safety and Security in 1996 which developed 20 specific recommendations for improving security including the CAPS (The Computer-Assisted Passenger Screening System) for passenger profiling; the 1996 FAA Act which directed the FAA to improve screener performance, including certifying screening companies; and most recently, the FAA proposed a Notice of Proposed rule-making that would require certification of screening companies. Each one of these actions has been a step in the right direction, but in my mind there are still problems that need to be addressed.

Technologically, many advancements have been made that will contribute to our goal of maintaining passenger safety. The development and implementation of a new generation of x-ray machines that are able to pick up explosive devices, and the use of various Explosive Detection Systems (EDS). However, our screening practices in the United States still remain far behind that of our European counterparts.

The average annual screener turnover rates in the US exceed 100% per year in most major airports and up to 400% per year at one airport in particular. It is apparent that we in the US, who are striving to achieve the highest level of security, are not requiring the necessary training and experience to carry out such a vital role. Currently, the average wage for screeners in the US averages \$5.75 per hour and some do not receive fringe benefits.

As a point of contrast, the European screener personal receive significantly more training and higher salaries than screeners in the US and receive comprehensive benefits. Many screeners in Europe also have more screening experience on average than their US counterparts. As a result screeners in many European countries have been able to detect more than twice as many test objects as screeners in the US. Madam chairman, this is an obvious problem that needs to be addressed. We may advance

years ahead in technological equipment, but without properly trained and experienced personal, such equipment is useless.

I believe that the recent proposed rulemaking by the FAA will make a positive contribution to the current screening practices through the mandatory certification of screening companies who will be held to a specific set of standards. However, the FAA has declined to require the certification of individual screeners believing that they do not have the statutory authority under Title 49 of the FAA reauthorization act of 1996. Currently, the air carriers have the responsibility to conduct screening, and the proposed rulemaking will set standards that they must adhere to and would make the carriers accountable for any failures. This is a step forward, but I also believe that the FAA must specifically
