

Congressional Commitment to Security

By Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.)

Airline travel remains important to our society and a vital part of the U.S. economy, essential to the movement of goods and people throughout the United States and around the world.



Over the past 5 years, much progress has been made in increasing the security at airports and aboard airlines themselves. But more work is still to be done, and we must continue to do all we can to make certain that airline passengers, crews, and airplanes remain safe and secure. For we have seen the dire consequences of failures in airline security.

After Sept. 11, 2001, Congress enacted a number of reforms to enhance airline security. These included specific fixes like the hardening of airline cockpit doors, as well as broad measures like the creation of the Transportation Security Administration. Among the TSA's numerous responsibilities, it is tasked with screening airline passengers and baggage and has deployed thousands of screeners at airports

monitoring passengers and baggage. To improve passenger service and security, the TSA has also created the Registered Traveler program, designed to allow prescreened passengers to go through expedited security screening lanes at participating airports, allowing screening resources to be focused on higher-risk passengers and baggage.

Another important security program is the Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS), which has been augmented significantly over the past 5 years. The United States had fewer than 50 federal air marshals on active duty before 9/11. Today, thousands of air marshals are deployed daily to cover airline flights, both domestic and international. And the FAMS can play an important role in airport security as well—after Hurricane Katrina, a team of more than 200 air marshals secured Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans, after local authorities abandoned it. The Federal Air Marshal Service is an important program, and Congress must continue to fund it accordingly.

These are just a few prominent examples of the many security measures that have been put in place over the

past 5 years. Yet, despite all these advances, our airline security still has a number of vulnerabilities. Questions have arisen about the effectiveness of TSA screening techniques, the delays and success of Registered Traveler, and problems with other initiatives like the Federal Flight Deck Officer program. The U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security is committed to ensuring the safety of our airlines and continues to conduct rigorous oversight of the Department of Homeland Security to help solve these problems.

Toward this end, the Committee has introduced the Transportation Security Administration Reorganization Act. This bill, sponsored by Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Calif.), includes a number of provisions that will maximize transportation security, reduce airline pas-

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senger frustrations through more-efficient screening procedures, and eliminate wasteful government spending. Among other things, the bill requires the TSA to focus its resources on the areas at highest risk of potential terrorist attack, mandates federal investment in next-generation explosives-detection technology, and ensures that airports and air carriers themselves are investing in checkpoint equipment. The bill also creates a program to quickly prescreen international passengers traveling to the United States and removes hurdles that have prevented airline pilots from volunteering to become armed Federal Flight Deck Officers. Overall, the bill is comprehensive legislation that will go a long way toward increasing the security of our airlines.

It has been almost 5 years since Sept. 11, 2001, and important progress has been made. But we can never forget the horrors of that day—and the Committee on Homeland Security is committed to providing the best security possible for the airline industry and the American people. I thank the Air Line Pilots Association for all that you do to help keep the American people safe. And I can promise you that I will never rest in my efforts to see that the DHS and the TSA have the resources, support, and guidance they need to ensure that a tragedy like September 11 never happens again. 🌐



across the United States. Technology also plays a major role in screening enhancement, and new technologies such as explosives-detection systems have been developed and deployed to U.S. airports to aid the screeners in

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