

**"Has Airline Security Improved?"**  
**Senator Joseph Lieberman**  
**November 14, 2001**

Good morning. Today the full Committee on Governmental Affairs and the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management asks the question: "Has aviation security improved since September 11?"

The fear and loss of life caused by the attacks that day have focused an intense and very personal spotlight on the question of airline security. Since September 11, the number of airline passengers has fallen off more than twenty percent. The crash Monday of American Airlines flight 587 in New York, of course, has renewed concerns in the minds of many Americans about the safety of air travel.

Our hearts go out to the families of those who died in that crash, even as we continue to work to find ways to allay concerns about the security of air travel. If the cause was mechanical, we need to find out what went wrong and take steps to prevent future accidents. If it was a terrorist act, of course, we must urgently redouble our efforts to make our airports and airplanes more secure. As one airline executive told the *Washington Post*, and I quote, "while it's tragic under any circumstance, the impact to the psyche of the traveling public would be greater if it were a security-related cause."

Because its investigation is just beginning, I do not intend to ask the FAA or other witnesses today questions directly related to the Monday crash. This hearing was scheduled well before the incident and is more broadly focused on the measures that FAA, the airports, and the airlines have taken in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

We in Congress began our most recent round of investigations of airline security immediately after September 11. This Committee held a hearing about two weeks later on September 25. The Senate finished work a month later, October 11, on an aviation security bill that makes sweeping changes in the way that airline and airport security is handled, including expanding the air marshal program and "federalizing" passenger and baggage screening services. I'm very proud that amendments to this bill sponsored by me and Senator Durbin on the one hand and by Senator Thompson on the other, were adopted by the full Senate and are part of the bill and, I think, make it stronger. The House passed a very different bill, and the conferees are now at work. I want to plead with the conferees to really stretch to quickly reach agreement. It will truly be outrageous if Congress leaves for Thanksgiving without passing aviation security legislation and sending it to the President to be signed. It is now, after all, two months since our aviation system was used by terrorists to attack us. We've reacted very quickly... It's long past the time when we should find common ground and pass aviation security legislation. And ground remember – as Congress also struggles to find common to security adopt an economic stimulus plan – that aviation also passage of means economic security and growth. So aviation its security legislation - both in direct terms and in psychological our affect - is one of the best things we can do to help economy grow again.

But even if enacted today, these changes would not have an immediate effect. The focus of this hearing is therefore what has been done, is being done, and should be done to improve aviation security.

Since September 11, FAA has issued a series of new security directives to airports and airlines. Some of them are familiar to those of us who fly frequently, like the restrictions against anyone but ticketed passengers in sterile areas and the conspicuous presence of uniformed

National Guard personnel at screening checkpoints. Other, less visible measures are also being undertaken, such as the use of computer programs to pre-screen passengers and stepping up security in the ramp areas. And, consistent with Transportation Secretary Mineta's "zero tolerance" policy, FAA is more willing today to take stronger actions in response to perceived security breaches - such as bringing taxiing planes back to the gate, or evacuating a concourse, or holding a flight, as has been done on numerous occasions since September 11. These are all welcome developments.

Nevertheless, there continue to be embarrassing and potentially dangerous lapses in security. One of the most egregious occurred a week and a half ago, when a passenger at O'Hare International Airport was relieved of two pocketknives at a security checkpoint, but still managed - apparently even after being detained for 12 minutes by security personnel - to get through with seven folding knives, a stun gun, and a container labeled pepper spray before his carry-on bag was searched at the gate. More weapons were later found in his checked baggage. The man turned out to be a Nepalese native who was in the U.S. on an expired student visa and was carrying a fake INS work authorization card under a different name. The personnel involved were all employees of Argenbright, a company that has a long record of hiring and training violations and deficiencies in adhering to proper security procedures.

Today we want to explore how such incidents could occur, in spite of our heightened vigilance. We need to ask: How unusual are these incidents? Are there more such incidents today than there were last year or are we just more aware of each incident because of heightened public and media scrutiny? And, bottom line, are airline passengers any safer today than they were before September 11?

We need to question if the new FAA requirements are stringent enough to deter violence in our skies and if they are being properly carried out by security personnel on the ground. How consistently are these orders being implemented across the nation? Why, for instance, does it seem that random carry-on baggage checks are standard in some airports but not in others?

We also want to find out how aggressively airlines are examining checked baggage. For example, in spite of the fact that the government has ordered that greater use be made of Explosive Detection Systems, passengers have reported seeing these machines sitting idle in some airports. In fact, we'll hear from the Department of Transportation's Inspector General today that a spot check conducted at nine airports this last holiday weekend showed that fewer than 30 percent of these machines are in continuous use. And, it turns out the American Airlines terminal at Kennedy International Airport, where Monday's ill-fated flight originated, apparently has no bomb-detection equipment at all. How can that be so?

President's Bush's announcement that he will increase the National Guard presence at airports by 25 percent over the holidays, as well as expand their duties, is welcome. But the Committee would like to know more about the Guard's role and effectiveness.

Americans who want to fly ought to be able to look forward, in this season of celebration, to celebrating and not a feeling of insecurity.

These are the lines of inquiry that I want to pursue today. In doing so, I hope to clarify what the current state of aviation security is and what each of us can do to make it better.

Let me turn now to Senator Thompson, the ranking member of the full Committee, and then to Senator Durbin, chairman of the Oversight of Government Management Subcommittee and a passionate leader on aviation safety issues for this Committee, and finally to Senator Voinovich.