

News from Ed Markey

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BUSH ADMINISTRATION CUTS AIRPORT SCREENERS, LEAVES BACKDOOR ON PASSENGER PLANES WIDE OPEN

Washington, DC: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, released the following statement on the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) further cutting the airport screening force by a total of 6,000 people, over the last six months. Additionally, the TSA plans to announce the recommendations of the Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) tomorrow, which will focus on upgrading the "known shipper" program, not requiring any physical screening of cargo on passenger planes. Rep. Markey will be holding a press conference to react to the security recommendations of the ASAC tomorrow afternoon.

"It is truly unbelievable that the Transportation Security Administration has cut 6,000 airport screeners in the last six months. The TSA continues to ignore the warnings of the intelligence and security communities who suggest passenger airplanes are still on the very top of the terrorist target lists. As it cuts more qualified, well-trained screeners, the TSA complains that it does not have the capabilities to screen any cargo on passenger planes. Unscreened and un-inspected cargo continues to represent a gaping loophole through which terrorists can still ship a bomb, biological, chemical, or radiological materials, or even themselves."

"Instead of requiring cargo to be physically screened before it's loaded on passenger planes, the TSA continues spending more money on the flawed 'known shipper' program, which is really just an 'unknown cargo' program. Congressional Republicans and the Bush Administration said screening cargo it is too expensive. But if we can find \$856 million to upgrade and repair airports in Iraq, why can't we spend money to screen passenger plane cargo here at home?"

"In order to fly, passengers must produce an ID, a boarding pass, and still go through metal detectors and put their baggage through explosive detection equipment. TSA spends quite a bit of time ensuring that no passenger can even get on a plane with nail clippers, but after passengers do board a plane, they are biting their nails because they watch unscreened and un-inspected cargo being loaded right underneath their feet."

Rep. Markey along with Rep. Chris Shays (R-CT) had successfully attached a cargo screening amendment to the House version of the Homeland Security Appropriations bill, by a vote of 278-146, and also had succeeded in passing, by a vote of 347-47, a motion to instruct House conferees to include the cargo screening provision in the final version of the Homeland Security Appropriations bill. Despite these winning margins, the Markey-Shays cargo screening provision was dropped during the conference to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the Homeland Security spending bill.

According to the General Accounting Office, approximately 22 percent of air cargo transported in the United States is carried aboard passenger planes.

More information can be found at www.house.gov/markey.