

ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS –
CWA, AFL-CIO



TESTIMONY OF

SARA NELSON
INTERNATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

BEFORE

THE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY

UNITED STATES SENATE

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Thank you, Chairwoman Landrieu for giving us the opportunity to testify today. Our President, Veda Shook regrets that she was unable to be here today and sends her best wishes and greetings. My name is Sara Nelson and I am the International Vice President of the Association of Flight Attendants – Communication Workers of America (AFA), AFL-CIO. AFA represents nearly 60,000 Flight Attendants at 22 different airlines and is the world’s largest Flight Attendant union. We appreciate having the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing on “Balancing Prosperity and Security: Challenges for U.S. Air Travel in a 21st Century Global Economy.”

In the 10 years since the 9/11 attacks, Flight Attendants have been assigned increased responsibilities for ensuring safety, health and security in the cabin. We receive training in fire control, first aid, aircraft evacuation and emergency procedures, and are responsible for protecting the flight deck and cabin from an attack. Flight Attendants play a key role in the security of passengers on the aircraft and are required to be on passenger flights.

Flight Attendants, as the first responders in the aircraft cabin, have a unique perspective on a number of the programs of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). We are pleased to have a seat here today to share our views on how the federal TSA workforce, expedited screening for all crewmembers, and establishing a standardized carry-on baggage policy can enhance safety and security while improving convenience and efficiency at our nation’s airports.

TSA WORKFORCE

When airport security was federalized, security improved immediately. On September 11, 2001, I was based in Boston as a United Airlines Flight Attendant. I remember airport security prior to September 11th. I remember the faces of the screeners who worked the check point for terminal C at Logan. The terrorist would have passed through this check point to board United flight 175. I remember the screener’s faces because they were there all the time, 7 days a week, all hours of the day. I remember their accents and their sweet, but tired smiles. I remember their efforts to work the long hours for the lowest bidding security company just so that they could provide for their own families. I lost twenty-five of my flying partners that day, my profession was

redefined and our world changed forever, and I often wonder how those hard-working security personnel have coped with their part in failing to stop the most fatal attack on U.S. soil. Do they understand they were set up to fail?

We commend TSA Administrator Pistole's efforts to date to limit privatization of security at additional airports and we oppose recent actions of this Congress to attempt to force the Administrator to allow more privatization. Federalizing airport screening has been a success, improving the security of air travel. Flight Attendants and passengers are safer today because of it. Flight Attendants are the last line of defense in aviation security. My colleagues and I depend on TSA workers to keep our jobs safe. We depend upon a regulated security system that meets the requirements of *The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Commission Act)*, [Pub. L. 110-53](#).

Effective passenger and baggage screening is a vital part of our layered defense against terrorism in the skies. It is also a difficult job with massive responsibility.

There is a growing drum beat demanding a return to the old system where security checkpoints were contracted out to the lowest bidder. To return to a bottom-line driven system that puts security second to profits borders on reckless and is an unjustified regression from TSA's successful mission to protect the skies.

The Flight Attendants of this country act as first responders every day of the year and our lives depend on the integrity of each layer of security in the airport and on the aircraft. TSA must have the funding to give screeners the staffing, support and training they need to do their jobs to help keep our skies safe and secure.

SECURITY SCREENING

For more than five years AFA has pressed for alternative screening for Flight Attendants that would accurately reflect our credentials as pre-screened safety professionals. Our advocacy on alternative screening is all the more important and relevant as the TSA moves to implement risk-based passenger security screening.

Flight Attendants are subject to the same level of screening and background checks as pilots, with the exception of those pilots participating in the FFDO program. Flight Attendants are an integral part of the crew and the purpose of our jobs is to handle inflight safety and security. Yet Flight Attendants are not included in the same alternative screening as our pilots. TSA has stated that a similar screening process is contemplated for Flight Attendants, but concrete dates or milestones to start this inclusion process have yet to be announced.

The 9/11 Commission Act requires the Department of Homeland Security to implement an alternate security screening system for sterile area access control within commercial service airports. The system was to be used by all crewmembers. The subject is extremely relevant for today's hearing. First, an alternate security screening process for crewmembers contributes to a *more efficient* travel experience as it reduces passenger-screening congestion. Second, the system recommended was included in a report that focused on creating a *more secure* aviation system.

In May of 2009 TSA announced a test program, CrewPASS at three airports. Participation at these airports was voluntary but plans to expand the system were underway until November of 2010. New screening technologies, Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) scanning machines, were deployed in over 68 airport locations with TSA implemented enhanced screening procedures at security check points. Any person, who did not want to utilize the new AIT machines, and set off the alarm at a walk-through metal detector, would be subjected to an "enhanced" pat-down.

The Thanksgiving weekend roll-out was done without consultation of the industry or aviation workers on the front-lines of security. A Memphis pilot refused to submit to the new screening procedures and was subsequently denied access to his aircraft. Faced with a public outcry, TSA announced that pilots would be exempt from the new screening procedures and TSA would implement an expedited screening program based upon the CrewPASS test program, utilizing the Cockpit Access Security System (CASS) database. Since the CASS database was designed to verify the identity and employment status of pilots allowing them access to the jumpseats of

airplanes belonging to companies other than their own – it was to be limited to pilots only.

On November 19, 2010 AFA held a meeting with Administrator Pistole to discuss the concerns of our members about these procedures and to reiterate our call for TSA to implement CrewPASS that would provide Flight Attendants with a non-invasive method of screening. At this meeting TSA said that pilots and Flight Attendants would be subjected to the exact same screening procedures and the Administrator agreed to work with AFA on a range of security related issues, including screening procedures.

On August 11, 2011 TSA started another expedited alternate screening program similar to CrewPASS called Known Crewmember (KCM). TSA, working in cooperation with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) and Airlines for America (A4A), rolled out the program at a few U.S. airports and it was available for pilots from specific airlines only. Flight Attendants, with the same background checks as their pilot crewmember counterparts, have not been included in the program.

While TSA continues to consider when or if to include Flight Attendant participation in the Known Crewmember Program, the agency has announced pilots from additional airlines are scheduled to be included in addition to implementing other alternative screening initiatives for frequent travelers and active duty service members. AFA supports risk-based screening initiatives designed to make the screening process more convenient without sacrificing security. Flight Attendants should be recognized for the work we do and for the service and safety we provide, and permitted to participate in alternative screening. In terms of supporting security, efficiency of the program and convenience for travelers currently sharing screening lines with Flight Attendants, TSA should move quickly to include *all* crewmembers in KCM. We encourage this Committee to request a report from TSA establishing milestones for including Flight Attendants in the program as mandated by the 9/11 Commission Act.

Flight Attendants are first responders and since 9/11 we have also taken on the role as the last line of defense for aviation security. Flight Attendants routinely identify and manage threat levels, use our training to de-escalate threats, and provide direction to

helper passengers to assist in restraining assailants. We are charged with protecting the cockpit at all costs, including the loss of our own lives. Security doesn't just happen; over one hundred thousand Flight Attendants working in U.S. aviation system fill our role to make sure our skies are safe.

Flight Attendants have access to the flight deck and we are subject to the same 10-year background checks as pilots. Like pilots, we carry a certificate issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The 9/11 Commission Act provided direction that all crewmembers, Flight Attendants included, take part in expedited, alternate screening. Other stakeholders are in agreement: ALPA and A4A have both requested that the TSA expand the program to include Flight Attendants in the future.

The time is now. Passengers are being invited to opt-in to expedited security screening programs simply because they log a certain number of miles on U.S. carriers. The nation's certified Flight Attendants, serving as the last line of defense, surely meet the requirements of the Known Crewmember program.

CARRY-ON BAGGAGE LIMITATIONS

To improve efficiency and security during the screening process and during the boarding process, TSA should issue regulations that would set a standard limit on carry-on baggage permitted to pass through security checkpoints. TSA has introduced passengers to the concept of 3-1-1 regarding liquids, aerosols and gels. That is, 3 ounces in a 1-quart clear plastic, zip-top bag; 1 bag per passenger placed in a screening bin and fit through a template on the X-ray conveyor belt. We call upon the TSA to add two numbers to this equation 1+1: One bag, plus one personal item.¹

Reducing the size and number of carry-on bags would ultimately enhance security screening by reducing the number of bags that need to be screened at airport checkpoints.

¹ Exclusions: any regulations established by the FAA or TSA should not apply to child safety seat nor a child passenger, assistive devices for disabled passengers, musical instruments, outer garments or to working crewmembers in uniform.

Current guidelines for carry-on bags were established more than two decades ago when air travel was much different than today. Each carrier had to have an individual program to control the weight, size and number of carry-on bags. This created a maze of varying programs making it difficult and confusing for passengers. With the formation of global alliances and code share agreements individual program philosophies add to the confusion since alliance members sell seats on their partners' routes. A ticket purchased from one carrier may be subject to the carry-on bag rules of another.

The concept of limiting the size, type and amount of carry-on baggage in relation to improving security is nothing new and was recommended by the FAA Aviation Security Advisory Committee in 1996. Similarly after 9/11 the FAA issued guidance to carriers to limit passengers to one carry-on bag and one personal bag (such as a purse or briefcase). This restriction is loosely enforced.

AFA has filed two petitions for rulemaking requesting the FAA to enhance their carry-on baggage rule, citing incidents involving carry-on bags that range from disruption in the cabin, delays in boarding and deplaning, physical and verbal abuses towards Flight Attendants and passengers, and injuries and impediments to speedy evacuations. Despite these two requests for rulemaking the FAA has failed to establish a specific requirement regarding size and number of carry-on bags allowed.

According to the Common Strategy security guidance, Flight Attendants are to observe passengers during the boarding process to watch for anything suspicious. Prior to takeoff, Flight Attendants can ask the Captain to subject a suspicious passenger to additional security scrutiny. The ability of Flight Attendants to provide this critical final layer of pre-flight security is being severely hampered by the distraction created with carry-on baggage chaos. Frequent flyers see it almost every flight: Flight Attendants are forced to manage excessive numbers of oversized carry-on bags in limited overhead bin space and removing baggage that doesn't fit.

Limiting the size and number of carry-on baggage would create a uniform, enforceable rule across the industry, and enhance security in the process. It will allow for more

efficient screening at the checkpoint and also improve the ability of Flight Attendants to more effectively observe passengers for possible security threats. The TSA could make travel more secure and convenient for passengers by issuing a standardized policy on carry-on bags and limiting the size and number of carry-on bags allowed to be screened at an airport check point.

In conclusion, AFA believes there are areas where improvements could be made by the TSA to foster efficiency while enhancing security. Security must remain federalized through TSA, Flight Attendant inclusion in the Known Crewmember Program should be expedited and the TSA should institute and enforce a standardized carry-on baggage policy. We look forward to continuing our working relationship with this Committee and the Chairwoman to make progress on these important issues. And, we look forward to working with Administrator Pistole to implement these important changes. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.