

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 24, 2013

Mr. Charles K. Edwards
Acting Inspector General
US Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Drive, SW, Building 410
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Edwards:

In March 2013 the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced a change in its Prohibited Items list to allow small knives to be carried through security checkpoints effective April 25, 2013. Under this new guidance possession of a knife on an aircraft is permissible if the blade is no longer than 2.36 inches or 6 centimeters in length, no more than ½ inch at its widest point in width, and the knife does not have a locking blade, a fixed blade or a molded grip.

This change in policy is highly controversial. Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Airlines, United Airlines and US Airways all regard it as unwise. They are joined in opposition by the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations, the Coalition of Flight Attendant Unions, the American Federation of Government Employees as well as the highly respected Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association.

Up until April 22nd the TSA stubbornly swept these objections aside and insisted that it would implement the policy change as scheduled. Late in the day on April 22nd, Mr. Pistole announced that implementation of the policy change would be postponed to give the TSA time to consider input from the Aviation Security Advisory Council and continue nationwide training. Secretary Napolitano told the Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee on April 23rd that the new policy is not being reassessed. It will be implemented at a future date. Skeptics might argue that the delay is nothing more than optics. In light of last week's terrorist attack in Boston this simply is an inopportune time to implement new rules that many stakeholders and a large percentage of the traveling public believe will create new dangers in the skies.

Had Administrator Pistole not delayed implementation of the knives on planes we were prepared to demand that TSA not move forward until it could demonstrate to your satisfaction that it was ready to do so. Now that TSA has decided to delay implementation we write to request that your office closely scrutinize TSA's process on this critical matter going forward and complete a comprehensive special review before the change is implemented.

The TSA has argued that this new policy will speed up checkpoint screenings and enable TSOs to focus on greater security risks. We fear that the exact opposite will occur. We are quite concerned that checkpoint screenings will slow to a crawl as TSOs and passengers disagree over the length or width of knives. It is our understanding the TSOs would not be provided with measuring tools to quickly determine whether or not a knife is acceptable. Instead, they would simply rely on the lessons of 15 minutes of training during which they would view pictures of

acceptable and unacceptable knives. Based upon those 15 minutes of training TSOs would be expected make a judgment on acceptability of knives at the checkpoint.

This plan gives rise to a number of concerns. Can we expect to see lengthy delays at checkpoints as TSOs consult with their colleagues and supervisors as to whether a particular knife is acceptable? Will we be subjecting the TSOs and other travelers to harm by requiring knives to be opened for examination in the crowded checkpoint line? Are these dangers increased if arguments ensue in the checkpoint line? Will travelers experience an increase in secondary screening simply because the primary screener cannot tell whether a knife is in policy? Will TSOs simply give up and allow all knives of reasonable length through if they can't figure out whether a particular knife meets policy? Can we expect vast inconsistencies in how the policy is enforced between checkpoints in a single airport and among airports?

Administrator Pistole's announcement delaying implementation of the knives on planes policy suggests that in learning from Boston the TSA must pay greater attention to the risk of explosives on planes. This is undoubtedly true. But another lesson of Boston is that even in a highly secure, tightly controlled environment, like the Boston Marathon finish line, terrorists are probing for new weaknesses in the system to exploit. We respectfully submit that allowing knives on aircraft potentially creates a new weakness in aviation security which should not be allowed to happen.

Respectfully submitted,



LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator



CHUCK SCHUMER
United States Senator

cc: Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security
Honorable John S. Pistole, Administrator, Transportation Security Administration