



15 July 2004

Letter to the Editor
Women's Wall Street

Dear Sir/Madam:

We have noted with due concern the series of events detailed by Annie Jacobsen in her article, "Terror in the Skies, Again?" The Professional Flight Attendants Association represents the 11,000 professional flight attendants in the employ of Northwest Airlines – and a strong advocate of securing the ever-present loopholes in this nation's aviation security system.

Since the horrific events of 9-11, we have been on the "frontlines" of aviation security and charged with protecting the flying public – our first priority. As crewmembers, we rely on the major layers of the security system which encompass intelligence, airport periphery, passenger security, and security identification display areas. However, the needs of this nation's flight attendants to adequately perform aviation security functions have been delayed and/or ignored.

We note, also, Ms. Jacobsen's description of a recent trip to India, indicating she never once felt fearful or unsafe. To this experience, it must be understood that Annie and her husband were on their "turf" where differing cultures and appearances necessarily do not have the same significance as here in the U.S. It must be noted, also, that Northwest Airlines is a prominent operator of flights in and out of India everyday and have faced some of the same concerns expressed by Ms. Jacobsen during her recent DTW-LAX trip, as described.

It must be pointed out that procedures and protocols employed by Northwest Airlines are consistent with all other U.S. air carriers – nothing more, nothing less. TSA security directives are complied with and incorporate specific guidance and requirements into onboard duties/responsibilities by our flight and cabin crewmembers, in addition to ground service personnel.

Further, Northwest Airlines' flight attendants have had the advantage of a precedent-setting security training program following the events of 9-11 in response to the call to better prepare our cabin crews for the "new reality" and a threatened workplace. This Cabin Response Plan training program offered in Fall 2002 was designed by Israeli experts in counter-terrorism and intelligence – and included self-defense techniques/strategies. Promoted by our flight attendant union, this program was in response to our flight attendants' new-found roles as onboard security specialists.

This training was envisioned as the basis in forming an industry standard to mandate comprehensive security training for all crewmembers in the U.S. While the U.S. Congress has voted four times to mandate such training, the TSA has continued with a great deal of "foot dragging" to the point of now – after nearly three years – proposing a "voluntary" crewmember self-defense training program. Just three weeks ago, the U.S. House of Representatives

approved a measure aimed at ensuring that all flight attendants are adequately trained to protect passengers and aircraft in the event of a terrorist attack. Again, as expressed by our associate Pat Friend of the Association of Flight Attendants before Congress: "It's outrageous that Congress must keep reminding TSA to fulfill its mandate and protect the flying public."

Additionally, today's decision by Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge again shows the reluctance of the government to further secure U.S. skies by canceling CAPPS II – the Computer-Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening System. The plan to collect personal information from airline passengers and rank such passengers according to terrorist risk level is being dismantled due to concerns over privacy and effectiveness.

The plan was never officially begun, even though the government has spent more than \$100 million on its planning. CAPPS II was touted as a key tool for keeping U.S. skies safe from terrorists, although the system has been under relentless criticism from privacy advocates and some members of Congress who called it an unwarranted intrusion into passengers' privacy.

In closing, as a concerned professional Flight Attendant organization, we would like to encourage Ms. Jacobsen to continue to publicize shortcomings in the aviation security system and the necessity to close those loopholes which affect our collective safety and security interests each and everyday. We ask, however, that there be some restraint exercised in making assumptions, inferences or questioning a carrier's actions, procedures or commitment to security for its customers, particularly those which involve the men and women who serve as the "first and last line of defense" onboard U.S. air carriers. We invite Ms. Jacobsen to join our ranks in advocating for the necessary changes to ensure air travel remains the safest, most secure mode of travel available.

Sincerely,

Professional Flight Attendants Association

Jeanne M. Elliott
PFAA National Security Coordinator