

TED STEVENS, ALASKA
GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, OHIO
NORM COLEMAN, MINNESOTA
TOM COBURN, OKLAHOMA
LINCOLN CHAFEE, RHODE ISLAND
ROBERT F. BENNETT, UTAH
PETE DOMENICI, NEW MEXICO
JOHN WARNER, VIRGINIA

JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN, CONNECTICUT
CARL LEVIN, MICHIGAN
DANIEL K. AKAKA, HAWAII
THOMAS R. CARPER, DELAWARE
MARK DAYTON, MINNESOTA
FRANK LAUTENBERG, NEW JERSEY
MARK PRYOR, ARKANSAS

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

MICHAEL D. BOPP, STAFF DIRECTOR AND CHIEF COUNSEL
JOYCE A. RECHTSCHAFFEN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR AND COUNSEL

December 13, 2005

Michael Chertoff
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) recently announced it planned to make changes to the Prohibited Items List, effective December 22, 2005. I am writing to express my concerns regarding these planned changes, and urge you to further consider the risks, threats and costs associated with the planned change and avoid taking a step backward in aviation security.

As you know, Administrator Hawley announced last Friday that TSA planned to change the Prohibited Items List, and allow scissors with blades less than four inches long, and tools without blades and less than seven inches long, to be carried on board a commercial flight. Administrator Hawley argues that the primary threat to commercial aviation security today is explosives, and that TSA screeners and programs should focus on explosives detection. The Administrator believes that the time and resources saved by TSA screeners at the checkpoint not having to stop the conveyor belt and study an image to determine if small scissors or tools were in a carry-on bag could then be devoted to ensuring no explosives are smuggled on board an aircraft, bolstering TSA's explosive detection programs.

I understand TSA's desire to focus on explosives detection and I agree this is a critically important focus. However, TSA can and should ensure no explosives are smuggled on board an aircraft while continuing to keep weapons and improvised weapons out of the hands of terrorists and disruptive passengers who are able to board the aircraft. Although we have taken steps to improve commercial aviation security and make it difficult for a terrorist to seize control of an airplane – by hardening cockpit doors, increasing the number of Federal Air Marshals, and providing defense training to flight crews - I remain concerned that the reintroduction of these items (which could be used as improvised weapons) will leave passengers and flight crews at-risk, and potentially compromise the security of the entire aircraft.

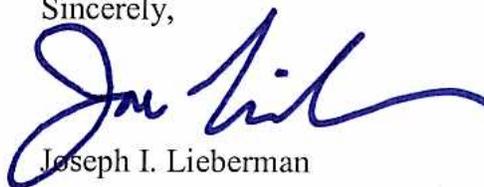
I do not believe the vast majority of Americans traveling via commercial aviation need or want to bring scissors or tools on board an aircraft, and they understand the threat

and risks such items could present if allowed on board an airplane. This planned change will only confuse the public, and potentially compromise security.

TSA already allows scissors with blunt tips on board, which can be used for cosmetic or sewing purposes, as well as scissors for the specifically verifiable needs of ostomy patients on board. There appears to be no need to lift the ban on any other scissors with pointed metal tips. I believe the change in policy would do little to alleviate screening delays or result in savings to the agency which could be used for explosives detection programs, since it seems likely screeners would need to stop the conveyor belt to check whether the scissors and tools in question fell within the length limit.

I strongly urge you to reconsider the decision to allow some scissors and tools to be carried on to a commercial aircraft.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Lieberman", written in a cursive style.

Joseph I. Lieberman

cc: Edmund "Kip" Hawley
Administrator, Transportation Security Administration