

Prepared Statement of Debra Burlingame,  
Member of 911 Families for a Secure America

Chairman Lungren, Ranking Member Sanchez, distinguished members of the Homeland Security subcommittee:

I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the Transportation Security Administration's proposed screening of commercial airline pilots. Thank you for requesting my views on this subject which is of great importance to the aviation community, the flying public and the American people. I am listed here on the panel as a member of 911 Families for a Secure America, but in truth, the qualification that has given me the greatest insight to the subject of today's hearing--and the one I prize the most--is that of sister. My brother was Captain Charles F. "Chic" Burlingame, III, pilot of American Airlines flight 77, which was crashed at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Chic was a pilot with American for 22 years. During his commercial career Chic was qualified on Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft and flew domestic and international routes. Prior to his career with American, he was an elite carrier-based fighter pilot for the United States Navy, serving a total of 25 years, combined active and reserve duty. Chic died the day before his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

While the devastating attack on our country three years and eight months ago was a horror for all Americans, those who work in the commercial aviation industry endured a particularly brutal experience. While most people watched the planes hit the buildings on September 11th in a state of shock and disbelief, for flight crews, witnessing the summary executions of their fellow crew members and their helpless passengers was a deeply personal experience. These are people who love airplanes, who have spent their entire lives associated with aviation, many starting from the time they were children, dreaming of the joy of flight. To them, seeing an aircraft used as an instrument of mass destruction is a perversion which contradicts everything they know and all they have trained to do.

I am grateful for the opportunity to commend them before members of Congress, for the incredible courage they exhibited in the days and weeks after they lost so many of their colleagues. They understood that the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the thwarted attack that ended in Shanksville, PA were attempts not simply to bring down airplanes and buildings. They knew that this was an all-out assault aimed at bringing down the United States economy. No one knows better than these aviation professionals how vital the airline industry is to our national and global economy. And so, with heavy hearts, they put on their uniforms, got back on their planes and, by their example, helped restore the confidence of the flying public in our commercial aviation system. As a former flight attendant, and above all, as Chic's sister, I cannot tell you how much it meant to his family to see those jets back in the air.

I think all would agree that September 11<sup>th</sup> changed the world forever, but again, no group of individuals feels those changes more acutely than those who work in commercial aviation, and no single group, in my opinion, has a bigger stake in bringing about successful aviation security policies than the men and women who fly those planes every day. For this reason, I urge members of Congress and this committee to pay close attention to what they have to say. They are uniquely qualified to assist you in addressing aviation security issues; they are highly

motivated, they are highly educated and they are extremely intelligent; they know the aircraft, they know the environment on the ground and in the air and their experience has given them an ability to cut through to the heart of any issue associated with their world.

A short but to-the-point anecdote illustrates my point and will go right to the issue of whether the Transportation Security Administration should subject pilots to security screening.

Prior to 9/11 it was routine for flight crews to by-pass security by displaying their airline-issued photo IDs and going directly to Operations. On this particular day, my brother was flying the tail end of a trip home to Dulles Airport from Los Angeles. He was accompanied by our brother, Brad, who obviously could not by-pass security, so Chic, in uniform and with his airline ID clipped to his lapel, stood in line and submitted to the same security procedures as everyone else, including putting his bag and crew kit through x-ray screening and walking through the magnetometer. After they were through, Chic shook his head and muttered under his breath. Brad picked up on it and asked, shouldn't Security screen air crews, too? It would be easy for them to secrete a weapon in their carry-on bags. Chic's reply was a tragic foreshadowing of the last flight he would ever know: "I'm a *pilot*. I don't need a gun or a knife. I've got an airplane filled with 60,000 pounds of jet fuel. Essentially, I'm flying a missile."

That was in 1999, two years before Chic's Boeing 757 was commandeered and used as a weapon of mass destruction in exactly the manner he presaged. It clearly illustrates what flight crews understood then and continue to believe now, that it is counter-intuitive and counter-productive to subject the most highly referenced, heavily back-grounded and operationally visible employee group in the private sector, to airport security screenings. Pilots are photographed, fingerprinted, and routinely monitored for competence. A large number are former military pilots with long records; some even continue to serve, as my brother did, in the military reserves. What does it say to the flying public, that the TSA is subjecting flight crews to x-ray screening, wanding them within minutes of handing them the controls of a potential lethal weapon?

Meanwhile, the TSA continues to allow hourly-wage employees who are not subjected to background checks to by-pass security screening altogether. Non-secure, unskilled workers who are employed on airport perimeters, in secure areas of the ramp, or even on the airplanes themselves, carry unsearched, unscreened personal belongings such as backpacks with them to these secure areas.

Over the last three years, ICE agents in Operation Tarmac have discovered nearly 6,000 unauthorized workers at airports and maintenance facilities around the country. They have arrested over 1,000 undocumented workers, including a fugitive alien with an outstanding deportation order, and issued 775 criminal indictments.

These facts suggest that the TSA lacks a fundamental understanding of the threat we continue to face. Even as we struggle to collate the databases which make up the so-called "No fly" lists consisting of the names of individuals identified by the FBI, State Department and the Intelligence community, the TSA continues to allow passengers to board airplanes by using Mexican Matricula Consular ID cards.

As an member of the FBI's Office of Intelligence testified before the House Judiciary subcommittee nearly two years ago, these cards are aggressively marketed by the Mexican government for the sole purpose of providing undocumented foreign nationals with identity documents that can later serve as breeder documents for US-issued ID. They are not linked to any central database and therefore offer no means verifying the true identity of the holder. According the FBI, they are "little more than simple, laminated cards without any security features." And they are widely available. Nevertheless the TSA continues to allow passengers to use them to board airplanes.

No one appreciates the difficult challenges which the Transportation Security Administration faces as we forge ahead. But if I could leave this committee with one message, and one message only, it would be this: remember the words of Chic Burlingame. Listen to the flight crews. They want commercial aviation to thrive economically and they want it to be safe & secure. Their own lives and livelihoods depends on it.