United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2003

Admiral James Loy
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
Washington DC 20590

Dear Admiral Loy:

We are troubled by recent press reports that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in Telluride, Colorado last summer on a single recruiting trip for security screeners that yielded very few results. In view of the fact that TSA has recruited a screener workforce of 62,000 employees, including 28,000 temporary employees, and will undoubtedly need ongoing recruiting efforts to maintain this large workforce, we believe the Office of the Inspector General should undertake immediately an investigation of TSA's recruitment programs.

According to press accounts, 20 recruiters from the TSA spent seven weeks - nearly two months! - at the Wyndham Peaks Resort and Golden Door Spa, a luxury resort in remote Telluride, Colorado, where the most inexpensive luxury room for a comparable time period in 2003 runs from $259 to $339 per night. In addition to the deluxe accommodations, complete with 18-hole golf course, indoor and outdoor pools, and fluffy robes, TSA spent more than $29,000 on additional security for its recruiters.

The stated purpose of the recruitment trip was to hire federal security screeners; however, the reports indicate the luxury resort is so isolated from working population centers, and the effort was so poorly publicized, that in some cases only one or two potential recruits came in per day. Overall, the 20 TSA recruiters hired only 50 people in the seven week period. The information available about this recruitment trip calls into question TSA's entire recruitment program and leads us to ask whether TSA has exercised any oversight over that program.

Congress established the Transportation Security Administration in response to the September 11 attacks. The purpose of the agency is to enhance the security of the flying public through Federal direction of all aviation security activities, especially of passenger and baggage screening. It is particularly disturbing that TSA appears to have chosen to spend scarce taxpayer dollars on an ineffective recruitment operation at one of the most exclusive resorts in the Rockies. We fail to see any justification for such an extravagant recruitment effort: it is neither consistent with the purposes of the Aviation Security Act nor effective in enhancing the security of the flying public.

We therefore believe the Inspector General should conduct a thorough review of the TSA recruitment program. In particular, we request that you look into the following:

- What criteria govern, and who is responsible for, decisions about which cities will be selected as bases for recruitment efforts, and where TSA recruitment personnel stay?

- Why was Telluride, Colorado chosen and why was the Wyndham Peaks Resort and Golden Door Spa selected as a base for recruitment? Did TSA consider other cities and accommodations in the region that are more accessible to labor centers and more reasonably priced? If so, on what grounds were they rejected? If not, why were they not considered?

- What was the total cost of the TSA recruitment trip to Telluride?

- How many TSA recruitment trips have taken place, how many were taken to comparably-priced resort communities, and what were the results of each such recruitment trip?

- How much has TSA spent on its entire recruitment program to date, how many personnel have been hired and how many more need to be hired?

- Does TSA exercise oversight over its recruitment program, and does it have authority to take disciplinary action against personnel who abuse the system?

- What steps, if any, have you taken to address this problem? Is it your view that the TSA now conducts its recruitment efforts in an efficient and cost-effective way?

These reports about TSA's recruitment program are more than just embarrassing indictments of waste in government; they threaten to undermine the extremely important aviation security program Congress established to prevent future terrorist attacks on the aviation sector and the flying public. We believe they also undermine efforts to exercise fiscal responsibility in a time of ballooning deficits.

We recognize that TSA had a change in leadership last summer, and that you have since undertaken a review of some of TSA's management problems. Moreover, on February 5, you assured the Senate Aviation Subcommittee that you would personally look into TSA's management controls – in response to testimony that anywhere from $6 million to $9 million might have been wasted in the process of hiring TSA screeners.

In view of this, we would appreciate your prompt and personal attention to our request, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator