

February 24, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you regarding the plan to deploy full-body scanning devices in the nation's airports. We are requesting that you suspend the program until a comprehensive evaluation of the devices' effectiveness, health impacts, and privacy safeguards is completed by an independent board of review.

Last week at a symposium in Washington, DC, we gathered experts in aviation security and radiation health impacts. We also heard from members of the Muslim community, the civil liberties community, and air travelers who have been placed on watch lists and subjected to secondary screening.

Based on this preliminary review, it appears that (1) the devices are easily defeated by concealing explosive materials in body cavities; (2) the health risks regarding the exposure to spurious radiation cannot be assessed at this time because no study has been undertaken; (3) the privacy safeguards do not work as the TSA has described – the ability to store and record images of naked American air travelers can be enabled by the TSA; and (4) air travelers subject to secondary screening who are actually familiar with the capabilities of body scanners would prefer a pat-down search to a body scan for both privacy and religious reasons.

We understand that the process is underway to purchase and install these system. But there are two key points that should be considered. First, the public does not currently understand the inability of these devices to detect the types of explosive materials that could be used or the possible risks to privacy and health.

Second, the Department of Homeland Security has made significant mistakes with similar programs in the past. Careful review has led to the cancellation of other DHS programs involving elaborate new technologies that turned out not to work. The DHS this year cancelled the further expansion of the "virtual border" fence, an enormously costly and complicated system. Camera and radar systems routinely failed.

Similarly, the TSA discontinued the use of "puffer" devices because, as the agency explained, "the machines proved unreliable." The TSA had spent \$30 million to buy 200 devices, most of which are still in storage.

Both of these programs were very expensive and diverted taxpayer dollars from initiatives that could have been both more effective and more economical.

EPIC and many other organizations had urged Secretary Napolitano to undertake a rulemaking on the body scanner proposal last year, before the December 25 incident, to ensure that the government agency received adequate public input before moving forward with this program. With the rush to deploy these devices more widely, the need is even greater for a measured assessment of the health and privacy risks to Americans, as well as the true utility of these devices.

Not surprisingly, the Europeans announced in January that they would undertake a three-month review to assess effectiveness, health impacts, and privacy risks before deciding whether to support the further deployment of body scanners in European airports. One member of the British Parliament, a former associate of an international technology company and expert in aviation security, has already advised the British Prime Minister that these devices are not effective.

The current TSA budget requests \$214.7 million for the purchase of 500 Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) devices this year, as well as \$218.9 million for Transportation Security Officers to support the "accelerated deployment of AIT."<sup>1</sup>

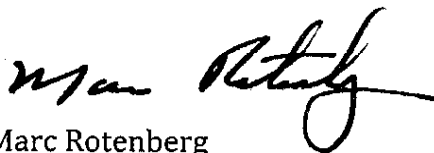
We are requesting that the Administration, in consultation with this Congress, withhold these funds from the agency until a full evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of these devices is completed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and your prompt response.

Respectfully,



Ralph Nader



Marc Rotenberg  
EPIC President

Cc: Chairman Bennie G. Thompson, House Committee on Homeland Security  
Ranking Member Peter King, House Committee on Homeland Security

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Homeland Security, "FY2011 Budget in Brief" at 73.