

SECURITY VS. BUSINESS

Tensions between securing the skies and running a company

By Angie C. Marek

Rep. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, was back on familiar ground last week, holding a press conference outside Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport. Since 9/11, Markey has repeatedly introduced legislation requiring the Department of Homeland Security to screen all cargo placed on U.S. passenger planes for explosives. Now he's urging DHS to take cargo off altogether. "If it isn't scanned,"

about security than we do," says James May of the Air Transport Association, or ATA, the airlines' trade group. But finding a balance between security and commerce is a daunting assignment.

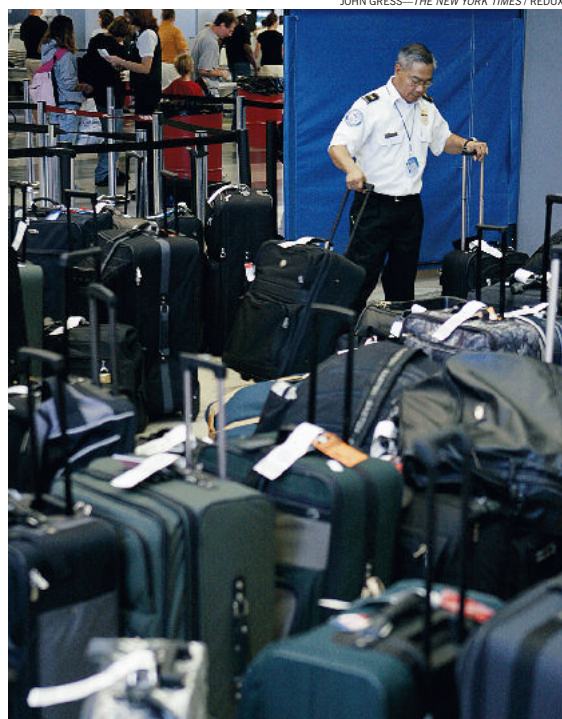
"Disastrous." Take air cargo. Airlines carry 6 billion pounds of commercial cargo each year, earning them \$4 billion. When Markey introduced his legislation in May 2005, it prompted letters from the ATA and the National Association of Manufacturers, which called the measure "disastrous." Airlines and shippers say reliable technology for screening cargo doesn't yet exist.

Markey says a government report indicates up to 60 percent of that cargo can be broken down and run through X-ray machines used on checked baggage. The 9/11 Commission's recommendation that airliners be equipped with a blast-proof container for suspicious cargo just isn't practical, aviation officials say; the containers weigh more than 300 pounds.

The threat from shoulder-fired missiles has proved equally vexing; the weapons can be bought on the black market for \$5,000. Two years ago DHS gave two firms \$45 million to adapt military technology that throws the missiles off course for use by the country's 6,800 commercial planes. A recent DHS report said one of the companies could install up to 1,000

missile-jamming devices for \$1 million per aircraft, with an additional operational cost of \$365 per flight. Congress has so far balked at the tab; the devices don't yet meet DHS reliability standards either. But Democratic Rep. Steve Israel says they're "good enough" to be on Air Force One.

DHS also faces turbulence on a proposed requirement that airlines transmit the names of passengers on U.S.-bound flights to American security officials an hour before takeoff. Aviation officials say that might put a crimp in potential last-minute business. So DHS said last week they would allow airlines to tweak the data up to 15 minutes before takeoff. ●



JOHN GRESS—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REXUS

SCRUTINY. Luggage for screening at Chicago's O'Hare airport

Markey said, "It should be banned."

The thwarting of the alleged British-based plot to blow up United States-bound airliners with liquid explosives has renewed attention on what critics say are troublingly familiar—but still unaddressed—security loopholes. Markey and some security experts say the aviation industry, which spent more than \$38 million on lobbying in 2004 and 2005, and portions of the business community have helped squash efforts to plug important gaps. Aviation officials argue that deploying expensive but flawed technology could significantly disrupt air travel or even bankrupt airlines. "Nobody cares more



GARETH CATTERMOLE—GETTY IMAGES

Police at the home of an alleged plotter

Unraveling a Scary Plot

Under Britain's tough anti-terrorism laws, a district judge last week ordered 23 men held another seven days for their suspected role in plotting to bring down as many as 10 U.S.-bound planes over the Atlantic. While the Brits remained tight-lipped about many aspects of the case, including how imminent the alleged plot was, U.S. officials say a dry run was scheduled for the weekend of August 12. British investigators discovered potential evidence including a suitcase reportedly containing explosive materials and other bomb-making components in the woods near where several suspects lived. Also found in their residences: flashlight bulbs, AA batteries, food additives, and hydrogen peroxide, which could be used to make a bomb.

In addition, law enforcement sources tell *U.S. News*, investigators found a videotape of several alleged plotters chatting about how the attacks would be viewed by the world. On it, one suspect says that perhaps people will conclude they were "brainwashed." To which another responds, by no means has *he* been brainwashed; he knows full well what he is doing—from watching television every night, an apparent reference to the Iraq war that has so roiled jihadis and may have persuaded these 23 to plan their one-way journey to martyrdom. —*Chitra Ragavan and David E. Kaplan*