



Congress of the United States of America
House of Representatives

Vernon J. Ehlers

January 20, 2004

Michigan

Mr. Andrew Heyward
President
CBS News
524 W 57th St.
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Heyward,

I am writing to express my concern about a story that appeared on *CBS Evening News* on Wednesday, January 14, 2004, regarding security at general aviation airports. I am concerned that the story and the accompanying report now posted on the CBS News website present an incomplete, one-sided account and fail to include information on general aviation security improvements.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the general aviation industry has worked closely with federal officials at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to improve security at general aviation facilities. Although the TSA has not issued formal regulations and passengers are not subjected to the same thorough security procedures as on commercial flights, many airports have already implemented several security measures. For example, the Airport Watch program, developed by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association in conjunction with the TSA, provides a system for reporting and acting on suspicious activity and includes warning signs, literature, and training. Other airport and pilot initiatives include alarm systems, controlled access to planes and facilities, and improved monitoring and surveillance, depending on the size and nature of the individual airport circumstances.

I have personally experienced heightened security measures before flying in a general aviation aircraft. Before boarding us, our pilot required me to show identification, even though he knew I was a Member of Congress, and he examined our luggage and checked for suspicious materials and passengers. I am confident that these types of procedures are utilized in many airports across the country.

The particular incident you referenced from Tampa, Florida, in which a young pilot deliberately flew a small aircraft into the side of an office building, did not illustrate the danger of general aviation. Rather, it demonstrated how little damage light planes can do. The airplane was destroyed and the pilot was killed, but the building suffered only minor damage.



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I am concerned that your report has provided skewed information to the general public about the potential security threat posed by general aviation. As with commercial aviation, security has dramatically improved in general aviation, and I am confident that the TSA will continue to work with the general aviation industry to further develop and implement security measures. It is unfortunate that your report failed to include or note these important changes.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. If you or your staff have any questions or want to discuss this further, I would be happy to speak more about the issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vernon J. Ehlers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "V" and "E".

Vernon J. Ehlers
Member of Congress

VJE:mr