



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

421 Aviation Way • Frederick, Maryland 21701-4798
Telephone (301) 695-2020 • FAX (301) 695-2375

Phil Boyer

President

August 25, 2005

Mr. Thomas B. Heffelfinger
U.S. Attorney
600 U.S. Courthouse
300 South Fourth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Dear Mr. Heffelfinger:

On behalf of the more than 405,000 members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) - including some 8,000 in Minnesota, I want to express our deep and sincere disappointment with the comments attributed to you in today's Minneapolis Star-Tribune ("Official urges tighter airport security," August 24, 2005). We respectfully believe that your quotes, if reported accurately, reflect significant misunderstanding about aviation security, and, in fact, are not consistent with the views and policies of the U.S. agencies responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the nation's general aviation airports.

Since the news story quotes you as saying that "it's your job to worry about what might happen if a terrorist ever stole a plane," you must know that following the September 11 attacks, no segment of aviation has been under more scrutiny than general aviation, with a resounding conclusion that general aviation does not pose a significant threat.

After grounding all aviation in September 2001, the federal government then incrementally restored flight operations after careful security review. The White House Office of Homeland Security (predecessor of today's cabinet level Homeland Security Department), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the Department of Defense, the Homeland Security Council, the Secret Service, the FBI, the Department of Transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration and other agencies have specifically examined general aviation flight operations in all parts of the nation - including Minnesota - and have sanctioned continued general aviation flight under current regulations.

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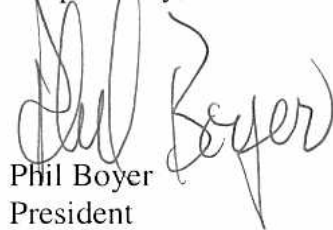
The TSA has testified before Congress that some security officials, in the wake of September 11, might have overstated the threat from general aviation. And underscoring this point, the U.S. Government Accountability Office report on general aviation security (GAO-05-144, November 2004) stated "the small size, lack of fuel capacity and minimal destructive power of most general aviation aircraft make them unattractive to terrorists, and thereby, reduce the possibility of threat associated with their misuse."

From your professional experience you certainly recognize that terrorists rarely, if ever, act spontaneously. Historically fewer than ten U.S. registered aircraft (a high value personal item) are stolen nationwide annually. According to the Insurance Crime Bureau, last year more than 11,000 automobiles were reported stolen in Minnesota alone.

Finally, we surmise from your comment in the Star-Tribune that airport security "is still too reliant on tenants identifying something that's out of place," that you question the effectiveness of self-empowerment tools such as AOPA's nationally-acclaimed Airport Watch Program. We would respectfully argue just the opposite – they work to near perfection, as proven by your experience bike riding at Flying Cloud Airport. The hundreds of security-minded pilots and workers at that airport did not feel the need to challenge your presence since, based on the news report, you were just doing your job.

We have reached out via phone to your office and would welcome an opportunity to meet and discuss the important issues surrounding general aviation airports, particularly because of the thousands of Minnesotans who rely on a safe, secure and efficient general aviation transportation network across the state, region and nation. In this regard, we look forward to discussing this further at your convenience.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Phil Boyer", is written over a printed name and title.

Phil Boyer
President