



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Washington, DC 20515

Don Young
Chairman

James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member

January 8, 2004

Lloyd A. Jones, Chief of Staff
Elizabeth Megginson, Chief Counsel

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The Honorable David Walker
Comptroller General
441 G Street, N.W., Room 700
Washington, D.C. 10548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Ensuring the safety of the American flying public is of paramount importance. In September 1998, SwissAir Flight 111 crashed off the shores of Nova Scotia. Onboard that fatal flight were 53 U.S. passengers who had purchased tickets on Delta Airlines for Delta Flight 1111. In this situation, Delta Airlines had a marketing arrangement referred to as “code-sharing” with SwissAir. Under code-sharing arrangements, passengers who book flights with one airline may actually fly on a partner airline’s plane. After the tragic SwissAir crash and at my urging, in 1999, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued safety guidelines for foreign partners of U.S. airlines. These guidelines call for U.S. airlines to conduct periodic safety audits of their foreign partners to ensure that the partners comply with international aviation safety standards.

The FAA’s safety audit program has been in place for several years and I would like GAO to examine how well it is working. At a minimum, GAO’s review should discuss the following:

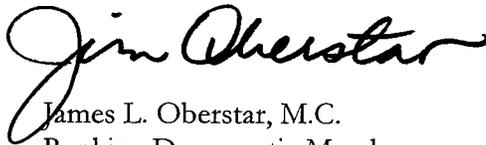
- The extent to which the safety audit program has been implemented, including information on the number of U.S. air carriers that are participating, the number of foreign code-share partners that are covered under the audit program, and whether the U.S. carriers met FAA timeframes for initial and periodic audits of their code-sharing partners.
- The nature and scope of the safety audits conducted by U.S. airlines and FAA’s oversight of them, including information comparing how major U.S. airlines carry out the audits, whether or not they are following best practices for audits, such as those described in GAO’s Yellow Book, and how FAA is ensuring that the audits are conducted and that the foreign flight segments are safe.

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If, in the course of your work you identify other relevant issues that you believe the Congress should be aware of, I would like you to include them in your analysis. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Stacie Soumbeniotis at (202) 225-9161.

With all best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Oberstar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Oberstar, M.C.
Ranking Democratic Member

JLO:ss/pk