

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 31, 2017

The Honorable John Kelly
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly,

Earlier this week, you made a public statement implying that high airline bag fees may undermine the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) efforts to detect dangerous devices in luggage. On "Fox News Sunday" on May 28 you said the following:

"[P]eople trying to avoid the \$25 or \$50 or whatever it is to check a bag are now stuffing your carry-on bags to the point of ... well, they can't get any more in there. So, the more you stuff in there, the less the TSA professionals that are looking at what's in those bags through the monitors. They can't tell what's in the bags anymore."

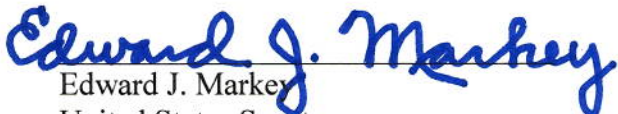
We write to request further information on the impact airline bag fees may have on TSA's ability to detect dangerous items – including firearms, explosives, and knives – as travelers pass through airport screening. With major airlines like American, United, and Delta charging upwards of \$25 for the first checked bag and \$35 for the second bag, and other airlines charging as much as \$50 per bag, it appears that passengers are cramming their belongings into carry-on items to avoid paying exorbitant fees. While this is understandable, it could mean that TSA professionals have more difficulty identifying dangerous content. Now that the busy summer travel season has arrived, with airlines expecting a record 234 million passengers and bag fees proliferating, we fear that the strain on the TSA could reach dangerous levels.

Given the urgency of the matter, we respectfully request that you answer the following questions about airline baggage fees and their impact on TSA screening:

1. Are passengers incentivized to cram belongings into carry-on luggage in order to avoid checked baggage fees charged by airlines?
2. Do densely packed carry-ons impede the ability of TSA personnel to thoroughly and efficiently screen the contents of the bags?
3. Please describe the capabilities TSA has to detect security threats in checked baggage compared to its capabilities to detect such threats in carry-on baggage. Is the TSA better able to identify security threats in checked baggage compared to carry-on baggage?
4. In the last five years, has there been any instance in which TSA personnel were unable to identify a prohibited item because a carry-on bag was too densely packed. If yes, please list every instance in the last five years, and please identify the prohibited item.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please respond no later than June 21, 2017. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact our offices.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator