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August 12, 2002

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

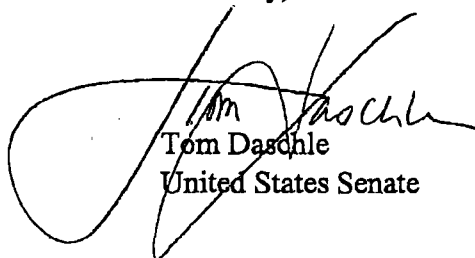
Dear Mr. Secretary:

As we approach the anniversary of September 11th, there will be increasing public focus on the adequacy of steps taken since then to improve aviation security. In addition, the Senate may soon debate whether to authorize commercial pilots to carry a firearm. These discussions and deliberations would be more meaningful if we had a decision from the Department of Transportation on United Airlines' pending request to outfit all its cockpits with Tasers, a non-lethal device that uses an electric charge to immobilize attackers.

As Secretary of Transportation, you were given the power to authorize the use of non-lethal weaponry by flight deck crews in Section 126 of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act. In December 2001, United Airlines formally requested that you approve the use of Advanced Tasers by its pilots. Since then, United has purchased 1,300 of these devices and trained its 8,300 pilots in their use. It has also completed extensive engineering studies and in-flight tests to confirm that these devices would have no adverse affect on the operation of cockpit instruments or controls. I am also told that recently three international carriers have begun deploying these devices on their flights outside the United States.

Although I am not endorsing any particular technology and have no opinion on the merits of the United application, flight-deck security is a matter of some urgency, and it concerns me that eight months have elapsed without a final decision on United's application. In fact, United's proposal raises a question of great significance to the ongoing debate over firearms in the cockpit: How effective would electric-stun devices be in enhancing flight-deck security? Your prompt reply to this question, as well as a decision on the United application, would improve our deliberations in Congress and help to address continuing concerns about aviation safety.

Sincerely,



Tom Daschle
United States Senate

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