

LAX Alert

Improving Safety, Security and Service Standards at Los Angeles International Airport

Unionized SFO Screeners Vastly Outperform TSA Counterparts at LAX

The *Los Angeles Times* reported on October 19 that from late 2005 until fall 2006, screeners at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and Chicago O'Hare International missed 75% and 60%, respectively, of fake bombs that were smuggled in by Transportation Security Administration (TSA) investigators posing as passengers. At the same time, screeners at San Francisco International Airport (SFO) missed 20% in their tests, significantly less than their counterparts.

While there are likely many differences between these workforces, it is important to note that the screeners at SFO are not employed directly by TSA, but by Covenant Aviation Security, a private contractor. While direct TSA employees do not have the right to form a Union under federal law, contracted workers do. Covenant screeners at SFO have formed a Union and have worked with Covenant to improve wages and health care in order to reduce the turnover rate and to improve training standards.



"Having a union means we can resolve workplace problems before they fester and become a distraction that impacts our work," said Verenise Palma, a Covenant screener.

As a result, SFO and its passengers benefit from having an experienced workforce, while TSA screeners at other airports have one of the highest turnover rates among U.S. government employees.

"I have been a screener at SFO for about a year," said Verenise Palma, a Covenant worker. "As union members, my co-workers and I have a voice at our jobs, and we receive good pay and benefits, so many of my co-workers have been around for a long time. Our collective years of experience help us better train and prepare for new ways to detect bombs."

In light of the SFO-screener example, LAWAW should consider participating in the TSA pilot program for contracted screeners. Also, the SFO case is a powerful reminder of the role that improved standards for workers plays in raising security and service standards.

Airline Profits Up While Customer Service, Job Quality Reach Record Lows

The *Los Angeles Times* reported on October 19 that airline profits are soaring. And those profits are thanks in part to the tens of thousands of airline contracted workers at LAX and other airports across the country. But, with profits up, workers and community members are asking why poverty wages, low training standards and inadequate health care benefits are the norm.

The Times article highlighted huge jumps in earnings from several major airlines at LAX:

- American Airlines, the nation's largest carrier, had third quarter profits of \$175 million, a tenfold increase;
- Delta Air Lines, the nation's third largest carrier, had their net income quadruple to \$220 million;
- Southwest Airlines had third quarter earnings of \$162 million, up 238% from the year-earlier period; and
- Continental, the nation's fourth largest carrier, reported a net income of \$241 million, a slight increase from the prior year.

Kate Hanni, President of the Coalition for an Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights, a consumer advocacy group, was quoted in the article: "I'm aghast there isn't more public outcry over this. They're making money hand over fist at the expense of passengers."

Victorina Ordonez, a contracted worker at LAX who provides services to passengers of American Airlines, said, "We work hard for airlines to be successful. We also deserve to share in some of the success. There's something wrong when the airlines are profiting in the hundreds of millions of dollars, while my children and I live in poverty with no health coverage."

The Times story also reported that "*the nation's airlines were late more often this summer, lost more baggage and bumped more passengers off flights than in any summer this decade.*" Airlines and their contractors have created a contracting system of high turnover and low training that makes these problems almost inevitable.



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