

MAR 28 2013

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598



Transportation
Security
Administration

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
United States Senate
Attention: Ms. Sherry Kuntz
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Thank you for your letter of February 11, 2013, written on behalf of your constituent, regarding an e-mail sent by a member of the public about a security incident that was reported to have occurred on Air Tran Airways Flight 297 on November 17, 2009.

On November 17, 2009, a group of 11 musicians boarded a flight from Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport to Houston, TX. One of the gentlemen was examining a camera and began working the mechanism and taking pictures. He was asked to put the camera away; however, he did not understand and responded in another language believed to be Arabic. Several other members of the group became involved and attempted to gain the attention of the only member of the group who spoke English. That individual was seated in business class and was unaware of the situation. When the group was unable to attract his attention with hand signals, they stood up and began walking toward the front of the aircraft. This occurred while the plane was in motion.

The pilot, once notified of the incident, decided to return to the gate and notify authorities. The musicians were escorted off the plane and questioned. Airline officials determined that the incident was a misunderstanding due to the language barrier and allowed most of the group to reboard Flight 297. The remaining group members were booked on a later flight. The pilot and several flight crewmembers elected not to continue on Flight 297, and a new flight crew was brought onboard the aircraft. In addition, some passengers chose to deplane and took different flights. On December 4, 2009, Air Tran posted a rebuttal of the information posted in the blog on its Web site, to include the fact that the blogger was not actually on Flight 297.

We appreciate that you took the time to share his concerns with you and hope this information is helpful. If we may be of further assistance, please call the Office of Legislative Affairs at (571) 227-2717.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Dietch".

Sarah Dietch
Assistant Administrator
for Legislative Affairs