

Obama Budget Adds 1,000 Airport Body Screeners

(Feb 1) – The Christmas Day bombing attempt prompted a last-minute budget tweak that includes money to buy more full-body airport screening systems, according to the White House budget chief.



Sharon Weinberger

CONTRIBUTOR

"The Department of Homeland Security had a healthy budget but we did make some additional adjustments after that event," said Peter Orszag, director of the Office of Management and Budget, according to ABC News. The alleged bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, reportedly concealed an explosive device in his underwear on a U.S.-bound Northwest Airlines flight.

The 2011 spending request includes more than \$700 million to buy an additional 1,000 full-body scanners for airports.

The Transportation Security Administration has already fielded two types of advanced body screeners at airports across the country: the backscatter system, which uses low-levels of X-rays, and the millimeter wave imaging system.

Both scanners create "naked" images of the human body, a concern for privacy advocates, and the backscatter system has also raised health concerns because of its use of X-rays.

Companies with other screening technologies have been touting alternatives to the two systems. For example, Iscon Video Imaging, a Massachusetts company, has a thermal-imaging system that measures the temperature difference between clothes and concealed objects, such as weapons or explosives.

The thermal-imaging system identifies the hidden objects, but does not create images of the human body, the company said. "In our mind it's an affordable product that is less expensive and it mitigates these two concerns – namely, health and privacy," said Peter Harris, the chief strategic officer for Iscon.

The technology is being tested by Transportation Security Administration in Atlantic City, according to Harris.

In the meantime, the more graphic full-body scanners are also being deployed abroad. The United Kingdom on Monday announced the mandatory introduction of full-body scanners at Heathrow and Manchester airports. Although privacy measures are in place, those who decline to be scanned will not be allowed to fly.