

# The Chief

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## 3 TSA Screeners Fired for Violating Rules on Baggage

By SARAH DORSEY

Three Transportation Security Administration airport screeners were fired and 19 were suspended last week for improperly checking baggage at Newark Liberty International Airport 16 months ago.

### 6 More Cleared

The security officers were placed on paid administrative leave in November 2011 and were informed they'd be fired last fall, just days before stronger due-process procedures negotiated by the American Federation of Government Employees went into effect. Six workers were cleared of all wrongdoing.

reportedly after being misidentified by the TSA.

Last year, agency investigators discovered that not all passenger bags were being opened after they were sent to a special screening room for suspicious luggage known as Room B-2. Newark management blamed the screeners, but the union said that many bags that had been cleared of suspicion had been sent to the room, due to malfunctioning luggage belts and other technical glitches. The employees' attorney, Philip Taubman, also charged that supervisors had sent some there intentionally, to justify sending more staff to the room and to meet screening quotas.

### Used Special Room

Instead of opening the cleared bags, the officers used a more-sophisticated computer-imaging system known as OSARP to check for hazards. Normally, such imaging is done in a separate room, but the union charged that in Newark, managers had clearly set up Room B-2 for such procedures: the equipment was stored there, workers were trained to use it there, and to bid on that assignment, they had to be OSARP-certified.

The TSA declined to say exactly what the three fired employees did differently, but a spokeswoman issued a statement that "TSA holds all of its employees to the highest professional and ethical standards and has a zero tolerance for misconduct in the workplace."

She noted that other officers have been disciplined at the airport since last year, with nine others fired and 24 suspended, including managers. Among those fired were eight who worked in baggage room B-2, including at least one caught sleeping on the job.

A 2012 ABC News investigation revealing several security breaches at Newark airport spurred the Department of Homeland Security's



**HYDRICK THOMAS: 'Threw officers under the bus.'**

Inspector General to look into the matter. The IG found that corrective action had been taken following fewer than half of all security lapses discovered by the agency.

Just last month, an undercover TSA agent at Newark snuck a fake bomb past two security checkpoints and a pat-down, and last October, an agency audit found that pat-downs were performed correctly just 16.7 percent of the time and banned items were confiscated just 25 percent of the time.

AFGE Local 2222 President Hydrick Thomas, who represents the reinstated employees, praised the decision, saying managers "chose to throw the Officers under the bus" rather than admitting they'd failed to train their workers properly.

Mr. Taubman said in an interview last week that he believed putting the workers on administrative leave for nearly a year and a half was wasteful in an era when funds for Federal programs are tight.

"Most of these officers had stellar records; they had no record of discipline, [and] many had been with the TSA since the beginning, 10 years," he said. "They could have put them on other assignments. They paid these people for over a year and a half for no work."

"They were also stigmatized," he said, adding that he believed the TSA had suspended many of them "to save face."