

WASHINGTON, DC – After two months of discussions with Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), the Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus (CAPAC), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced today new screening procedures for bulky items, which they hope will be more sensitive to different ethnic and religious groups.

TSA will not single out turbans as an object of suspicion, will now include screening procedures for headwear within the overall category of bulky clothing, and will not make headwear a separate category. That was the case when TSA changed its standard operating procedures (SOP) for screening headwear in August. That led to a rash of incidents across the country in which members of the Sikh American community complained they felt harassed because of their turbans.

“To me, the August policy raised concerns about racial profiling and religious sensitivity,” said Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), Chair of CAPAC. “We have been working with TSA Administrator Kip Hawley to find a balance between securing our airports and protecting people’s civil liberties. We hope the implementation of this revised SOP will do that.”

“We are encouraged that the TSA has found a solution that does not single out turbans for additional screening. Indeed, it is possible to secure America’s safety and be true to its principles of religious freedom,” said Amardeep Singh, Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition. “Still, we call on the TSA to implement safeguards that make good on its no profiling pledge.”

CAPAC and the Sikh American community also had religious sensitivity concerns about TSA’s August policy, as removing a turban is akin to stripping for those of the Sikh faith. Sikh American activists also said the August change was made without consultation with the community, which TSA had done in the past.

Since August, Honda has had several conversations with TSA Administrator Kip Hawley

regarding the agency's headwear screening policy. Honda, who spent his early childhood with his family in an internment camp during World War II, has been very concerned that TSA's August procedures could have led to profiling. Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA), Chair of CAPAC's Civil Rights Task Force, has joined Honda in this effort.

The announcement of the new SOP comes one day after the latest conversation between Honda and Hawley. Removal of all headwear is recommended to passengers but the rules accommodate those with religious, medical, or other reasons for whom removing items is not comfortable. Transportation security officers have several options for screening passengers who choose not to remove bulky clothing, including trace portals, trace detection, and pat downs and private rooms where the screening can take place.

"After my conversations with Mr. Hawley, I am thankful for the leadership that TSA has demonstrated to address this issue in a timely manner," said Honda. "The policy is a neutral one that may decrease the risk of profiling against Sikh Americans. I look forward to working with TSA to ensure that the policy is implemented in a non-discriminatory and religiously and culturally sensitive manner, and will revisit the policy in a few months to continue monitoring implementation."

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The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac>.