

Oct. 25 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on Proposed
Aviation Security Legislation
October 25, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The quickest, most effective way to increase aviation security is to pass H.R. 3150, the Secure Transportation for America Act. Time is of the essence. I urge your support for H.R. 3150. Making American air travel as safe and secure as possible is one of our Nation's top priorities. Last month, I proposed dramatic changes to our aviation security system: full Federal control of airport security and screening services; major expansion of the Federal Air Marshal program; and substantial new funding for aircraft security modifications. H.R. 3150 would accomplish these important initiatives and improve security quickly and effectively.

Both my proposal and H.R. 3150 give the Federal Government immediate and comprehensive control of aviation security. A new Transportation Security Agency, housed at the Department of Transportation, will hire Federal employees to supervise, manage, and train all passenger and baggage screeners. The new Security Agency would also establish and enforce new qualification standards for screeners, perform background checks on all screeners and other persons with access to secure areas at airports, and provide a uniformed Federal law enforcement presence at commercial airports.

Significantly, H.R. 3150 leaves the Federal Government the flexibility to build the best workforce to perform the actual screening function—another key element of my proposal. This model of Federal control plus flexibility mirrors the well-regarded

airline security systems in place in many European countries, which involve public/private partnerships. Many adopted this model of strong government oversight over high-quality private security companies after finding other models of airline security to be less effective.

Other legislative proposals would mandate that all passenger and baggage screeners *must* be Federal workers in all circumstances. Such an inflexible, one-size-fits-all requirement fails to permit security tailored to the very different circumstances that exist at airports across the country. I am pleased that Chairman Young and the co-sponsors of H.R. 3150 have chosen not to limit the Administration's options in choosing the strongest possible means to protect Americans who travel by air. Giving the Government the flexibility to use private contractors will facilitate transition to the new system, promote better screening services through competition, and ensure that security managers can move swiftly to discipline or remove employees who fail to live up to the rigorous new standards.

The American people deserve a quick and smooth transition to a better aviation security system. I urge the House to pass H.R. 3150 as soon as possible; and my Administration looks forward to continuing to work with the Congress on any refinements that may be necessary to ensure that the Nation's aviation security needs are addressed in the most effective manner possible.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH