



A bold voice for transportation workers

IMPROVING AVIATION SECURITY

The failed terrorist attack on Christmas Day 2009 was a clear reminder that our aviation system remains a target of extremist aggression and that security procedures must continually be re-evaluated and evolve to meet emerging threats. Aviation workers understand the security vulnerabilities that exist in our system and have been vocal advocates for closing known loopholes, greater federal investments in screening and other technologies, and forward looking policies to meet the evolving security challenges we face. Congress and the Obama Administration must aggressively move to implement security improvements identified by aviation unions and ensure that we learn from the events of December 25th and other attacks against our country.

There is little debate that the nature of terrorist threats has changed over time and that those who wish us harm are intelligent, adaptive adversaries who are constantly seeking new ways to evade the exact procedures put in place that were designed to thwart attacks. Extremists constantly change tactics and are using new methods and techniques to evade detection and undermine our security system to inflict maximum harm. As the incident on December 25th reveals, a terrorist was able to successfully smuggle explosive components onboard a U.S. carrier at a foreign airport. To be effective, our screening system must not only be able to detect these new and evolving weapons and explosive devices, but also identify untrustworthy passengers before they begin the airport screening process. Greater resources must be focused on identifying the select few who pose a true security threat, so that we can quickly screen the vast majority of passengers who do not. Not only will this enhance security, but it will allow the aviation system to operate more efficiently.

As part of the effort to focus time and resources on genuine threats, the Department of Homeland Security and its Transportation Security Administration must move quickly to implement an electronic biometric means of identification for aviation workers. This security upgrade is urgently needed and long overdue. The unique nature of the aviation industry produces a highly mobile workforce and vulnerable environment. Real-time electronic biometric identification will enhance security by allowing aviation workers to move more efficiently through the system and identifying those without authorized access. This is an initiative that transportation labor has supported for years and will continue to press for its implementation nation-wide.

Enhancing security in the aircraft cabin and flight deck is also a critical component of any security program. It is indefensible that nearly a decade after the tragic events of September 11th, adequate and comprehensive anti-terrorism training is still not mandated for flight attendants. At a minimum, comprehensive, industry-wide counterterrorism training should be required and include a combination of in-class instruction, hands on training, as well as situational and recurrent training exercises.

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We are pleased that the House-passed Transportation Security Administration Authorization Act (H.R. 2200) includes a provision that requires five hours of self-defense training biannually and rejects the notion that workers should have to pay for mandatory training or use personal days to complete it. We find it appalling that some air carriers continue to resist this mandate. We call on Congress to pass this provision and for the Administration to move aggressively to finally ensure that flight attendants get the level and type of training that is so desperately needed.

Several other initiatives will also enhance security in the aircraft cabin and should be mandated by law. Discreet wireless communications for flight attendants will provide an extra layer of security by allowing them to communicate instantly with one another and the flight deck in the event of a terrorist attack. New regulations limiting the size and number of carry-on bags will help restore order to the boarding process and enable flight attendants to better perform final pre-flight safety and security checks. Finally, passenger use of wireless communications, which could be co-opted by terrorist elements to coordinate attacks, should be banned while an aircraft is in-flight. The House-passed Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2009 (H.R. 915) takes a step in the right direction by including a permanent ban on cell phone use in-flight. We urge Congress to ensure that this provision is passed in a strong FAA bill.

Since its inception in 2003, the Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) program has been a highly successful component of our nation's layered aviation security system. This program has trained and deputized thousands of volunteer pilots to defend the flight deck against terrorist attacks. H.R. 2200 makes improvements to this program by opening up Federal Air Marshal field offices for FFDO training and reimbursing officers for training related expenses. Congress must see to it that H.R. 2200 is passed and ensure that the FFDO program continues at well-funded levels. Currently, the Federal Air Marshal Service has stopped accepting new FFDO candidates for training, claiming insufficient funding to support such efforts.

Numerous security vulnerabilities still exist in all-cargo operations. Security training for pilots and critical personnel is lacking. In addition, Congress must require that all-cargo flights are equipped with flight deck doors to provide added protection for the crew. Finally, stronger security measures must be implemented to screen cargo and protect access to all-cargo operations. While cargo aircraft do not carry large numbers of passengers, crew members are still especially vulnerable and the aircraft itself remains a potential weapon for terrorists.

TTD has also long advocated for one level of security at all contract aircraft repair stations, especially those located abroad. The Department of Transportation's Inspector General (DOT IG) recently determined that U.S. carriers now outsource 70 percent of their aircraft maintenance work with nearly 27 percent going to repair stations located abroad. One lesson learned from the December 25th attack is that terrorists will not hesitate to attack a U.S. carrier by circumventing security procedures at foreign locations.

We are pleased that the Obama Administration's TSA has recently issued proposed security rules that would cover both domestic and foreign repair stations working on U.S. aircraft and establish a process whereby these stations would be inspected for security vulnerabilities. It has been nearly seven years since Congress voted to impose security rules and inspections on foreign

contract repair stations and the previous Administration did absolutely nothing to implement this mandate. We remain concerned, however, that TSA's proposal does not go far enough in many key areas. For example, the rule imposes no requirements that foreign personnel go through any type of background check or threat assessment before working on U.S. aircraft at an FAA certified facility. We are also concerned that TSA has not identified the personnel or the resources that will be necessary to inspect the more than 700 repair stations located around the world. Other shortcomings that have been identified by transportation labor must be addressed as the rule is finalized.

We also call on the Administration to quickly nominate a new Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration. We are outraged that the Administration's previous nominee, Erroll Southers, was blocked by a few obstructionist Republican Senators who are apparently more interested in scoring political points than securing our nation. There are too many important issues and responsibilities pending at TSA in all modes of transportation to allow this type of politics to prevail and be repeated. We call on the Senate to quickly move forward on a TSA Administrator once a qualified candidate is nominated.

The security of our aviation system relies on the coordinated effort of all stakeholders. Together we can ensure that our system is well-protected. The failed attack on Christmas Day merely serves to remind us that extremist threats remain and that we must take aggressive action to counter their objectives. Transportation labor has proposed a number of key security measures that will make our nation safer. It is now time for Congress and the Administration to act on them without delay.

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