



United States Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

Contact: Leslie Phillips
(202) 224-2627

October 15, 2003

DEMOCRATS SEEK SECURITY TRAINING FOR FLIGHT CREWS Pilots Protected Behind Locked Doors; Flight Attendants Remain Vulnerable

WASHINGTON - Seven Democratic Senators, concerned that airline flight attendants have been left unprotected in the event of a terrorist incident, pressed Wednesday for mandatory and specific security training for flight crews.

In a letter to Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., and Ranking Member Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., the Senators noted that despite three legislative efforts in three years, flight crews have not received proper self-defense instruction nor training on how to handle a possible hijacking.

“As cockpit doors on commercial aircraft were secured to prevent future flight takeovers, flight attendants were increasingly concerned that they would be ‘on their own’ trying to protect passengers and themselves in the event of an attack,” the Senators wrote. “Flight attendants need training so they can take steps to deter potential attacks. They also need to know how to better coordinate their responses with those of federal air marshals on a flight.”

Signing the letter were Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., Senators Patty Murray, D-Wash., Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and Paul Sarbanes, D-Md.

The signers asked that language be restored to the Vision 100-Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act (H.R. 2115) conference report to require the Transportation Security Administration to establish minimum standards for flight crew security training.

Two previous pieces of legislation tried to address this vulnerability. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which became law in November 2001, required the Federal Aviation Administration Administrator to develop guidance for improved training for potential threats. The law, however, gave airlines the authority to determine the type of training flight crews would receive.

The Homeland Security Act, enacted in November 2002, directed TSA to issue rules requiring specific types of training. TSA has not yet issued the rules.

The FAA reauthorization bill, H.R. 2115, would require airlines to provide mandatory training that meets minimum standards, but the conference report changed the language to allow TSA to issue these minimum standards within one year, rather than requiring TSA to do so.

“The effect of this last minute change is to undercut any requirement that adequate self-defense training be provided for flight attendants,” the letter said. “This is unacceptable, both for the safety of the cabin crew and of commercial

passengers.”

The text of the letter is below:

October 15, 2003

The Honorable John McCain
The Honorable Ernest F. Hollings
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Hollings:

Since the conference report on H.R. 2115, the Vision 100–Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act, is reportedly being reconsidered, we are writing to ask that you restore language to the report that requires the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to establish minimum standards for flight crew security training.

Shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, flight attendants began calling for more substantial self-defense training for crew members as well as improved training on how to handle a possible hijacking situation. (See, e.g., testimony of Jacqueline Mathes, on behalf of the Association of Flight Attendants, “Has Airport Security Improved?”, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, November 14, 2001.) According to Ms. Mathes’ testimony to the Governmental Affairs Committee, before September 11, 2001, flight attendants received only minimal training in handling a hijacking incident. As cockpit doors on commercial aircraft were secured to prevent future flight takeovers, flight attendants were increasingly concerned that they would be “on their own” trying to protect passengers and themselves in the event of an attack during flight.

These concerns were addressed in two pieces of legislation. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA), signed into law in November 2001, required the Federal Aviation Administration Administrator to develop guidance for improved “flight and cabin crew training to prepare ... for potential threat conditions.” (Pub. L. 107-71, section 107.) However, the ATSA did not specify exactly what kind of training needed to be done and gave the airlines broad leeway to determine the kind of training they wanted to provide. The ATSA provisions were tightened considerably by section 1403 of the Homeland Security Act (HSA), enacted in November 2002. (Pub. L. 107-296) That law directed TSA to issue rules requiring self defense training for flight and cabin crews and set forth very specific criteria that the training must meet, but did not establish a deadline for issuing the rules. TSA has not yet issued these rules.

As you know, the conference report on H.R. 2115 makes another effort to ensure that flight attendants get the self-defense training they need. Negotiations between representatives for the flight attendants, the airlines, and House of Representatives staff from the Subcommittee on Aviation led to compromise language in the report requiring the airlines to provide mandatory training that meets minimum standards. Under this compromise, TSA would be directed to issue these standards within one year. Despite this agreement, the conference report was amended just before it was filed, changing the directive that TSA “shall” issue minimum training standards to “may.”

The effect of this last minute change is to undercut any requirement that adequate self-defense training be provided for flight attendants. This is unacceptable, both for the safety of the cabin crew and of commercial passengers. Flight attendants need training so they can take steps to deter potential attacks. They also need to know how to better coordinate their responses with those of federal air marshals on a flight.

We urge you to take the necessary action to ensure that H.R. 2115 provides that TSA “shall” issue minimum training

standards, so that we can be sure effective security training programs for flight attendants are designed and implemented. If your staff has any questions regarding this letter, please contact Susan Propper of Senator Lieberman's staff at 224-6599.

Sincerely,

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