

Congressional Closeup by Carl Osgood

Bush Aviation Security Measures Face Scrutiny

On Sept. 27, President George Bush, in a speech to airline workers in Chicago, announced measures to tighten security at the nation's airports. First, he called for tighter standards and Federal oversight of passenger and baggage screening. National Guard troops are to be deployed, at Federal government expense, to provide an immediate increase in security. Second, the number of sky marshals on board airliners will be increased "dramatically." Third, there will be \$500 million in new funding for stronger cockpit doors with secure locks so that "our pilots will always be in command of the airplanes."

House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), standing at Bush's side in Chicago, expressed strong support for the measures, but Democratic members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee were less enthusiastic. James Oberstar (D-Minn.), the ranking member on that committee, complained that Bush's measures don't go far enough with respect to passenger screening. "Airlines carry out that responsibility, now, by contracting with security-providing companies on a low-bid basis, and those companies hire the screeners and pay them the minimum wage. The results are what you would expect: high turnover in the workforce, failure of the screening process to work effectively," he said.

Oberstar is advocating, not just higher standards and greater Federal supervision of passenger screening, but Federalizing that function entirely. "The most basic responsibility of government is to protect its citizens against acts of war that threaten safety and security," he said, and the airlines "are the front line" of the war against terrorism. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), ap-

pearing alongside Oberstar, called Bush's package "half a loaf," saying that while locking cockpit doors and putting sky marshals on board airlines are "great measures," the first line of defense is to stop hijackers and their weapons from getting on the plane in the first place. What Bush and the Republicans have to decide, he said, is "are they going to stand in the failing system of today . . . or are they going . . . to break some campaign promises about no new Federal employees . . . about no new taxes?"

Ashcroft Pushing His Anti-Terrorism Bill

Attorney General John Ashcroft continued lobbying for his proposed anti-terrorism bill, despite criticism from both conservatives and liberals over civil liberties concerns. On CBS News' "Face the Nation" on Sept. 30, Ashcroft claimed that the tools that he is asking for would reduce the risk of more terrorist attacks, despite the fact that during hearings on Sept. 24-25, he couldn't give an answer when asked whether the measures he is asking for could have prevented the Sept. 11 attacks. Ashcroft made clear that he particularly wants the authority to indefinitely detain immigrants whose status is open to question.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Pat Leahy (D-Vt.), on the same program, noted that there were objections to Ashcroft's package from both sides of the aisle, especially in the House, and he indicated he was looking for a bill that would gain bipartisan support. He suggested that some parts of Ashcroft's proposal, such as those dealing with roving wiretaps, could pass easily. However, on the detention provisions, he warned that "we are go-

ing to have to make sure that we have some kind of check and balance in there. We don't want to be like countries that we criticize," when American visitors are detained, often without being told why.

On the House side, Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.) and ranking member John Conyers (D-Mich.) have been working on a bipartisan compromise that would exclude some of the more egregious provisions, including those dealing with indefinite detention, and retain those dealing with roving wiretaps, tracking Internet communications, and those who knowingly harbor a suspected terrorist. The committee is to begin formal work on the bill on Oct. 3, but Ashcroft had already expressed disappointment with a similar Senate-crafted compromise.

Congress, White House Reach Budget Agreement

On Sept. 28, press reports indicated that Congressional leaders and the White House were close to signing off on a deal to provide \$686 billion in discretionary spending for fiscal year 2002, about \$25 billion more than President Bush had asked for last January. This amount includes an \$18 billion boost in defense spending, \$4 billion additional for education, and \$3 billion for natural disaster recovery. However, these totals don't include the billions that will be spent as a result of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Already, \$40 billion has been approved for disaster recovery, security measures, and defense, and \$15 billion for the airlines.

Budget projections prior to Sept. 11 have mostly been tossed out the

window. During a Senate Budget Committee hearing on Oct. 2, Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) said that the budget surplus projection for fiscal year 2002 had been in excess of \$176 billion before Sept. 11, and is now already down to \$52 billion. He attributed this reduction to not only the spending increases, but also the reduction in growth.

However, while some members of infrastructure-oriented committees are putting forward legislation to increase investment in railroads and other physical infrastructure, budget balancers such as Domenici and Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) are proving that some things don't change. The central issue of the Oct. 2 hearing, which was convened to examine the economic outlook in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, was determined not by what is needed to recover from the attacks, but rather the long-term effect of whatever measures are taken on the Federal budget. Conrad was clear that whatever fiscal stimulus is adopted in the short term, "we must also couple that with fiscal discipline in the long term." He said, "We should do nothing that reduces our revenue base in the future, because that will have a feedback effect on interest rates, today."

Senate Passes Defense Authorization Bill

On Oct. 2, the Senate overcame the logjam that had stalled the fiscal year 2002 Defense Authorization bill and passed it by a vote of 99-0. Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) had pulled the bill from the floor on Sept. 25, because of a lack of agreement on amendments. One of these was offered by James Inhofe (R-Okla.), attaching the House-passed energy bill to the

Defense bill. Inhofe argued that the energy bill was relevant because it was both a national security issue and a military readiness issue. He told the Senate on Sept. 21, "Energy will be critical if and when America engages in military action."

The Defense bill returned to the floor on Oct. 2, following days of negotiations involving Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and ranking member John Warner (R-Va.). The turning point came during a Republican conference meeting on Oct. 2, when Warner and other GOP backers of the bill urged Inhofe not to hold the bill hostage to an attempt to force Daschle to schedule floor debate on the energy bill.

After a cloture vote of 100-0 to limit debate, Inhofe offered a sense of the Senate amendment calling on the Senate to take up an energy bill before the end of the first session of the 107th Congress. On a motion by Majority Whip Harry Reid (D-Nev.), the amendment was ruled non-germane. Reid promised that Daschle would bring an energy bill up before the end of the session, but Inhofe said that it was just more talk, as has been the case since the 1980s.

Experts Admit: They Don't Know How To Stop Terrorism

On Sept. 26, the newly formed House Intelligence Subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security held its first hearing, as Subcommittee Chairman Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.) put it, "not just to continue to raise the profile of the issue of terrorism, but also to talk about what the real threats are." Witnesses included Virginia Gov. James Gilmore (R), who is chairman of a Congressionally created advisory

panel on U.S. preparedness to respond to terrorism; former Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), who was a member of the U.S. Commission on National Security in the 21st Century; former Ambassador-at-Large for Terrorism Paul Bremer, who is chairman of the National Commission on Terrorism; former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre, now president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies; and Dr. Bruce Hoffman, of the RAND Corp.

Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.) opened up the most basic issue when he asked witnesses, "If we implemented all the recommendations" of the commissions represented at the table, "could that have prevented what happened on Sept. 11?" Hamilton called the question "highly speculative," and added that "the chances would be much greater to have prevented that kind of an incident if the Federal government was properly organized and coordinated to effectively deal with the threat of terrorism." Both Hamre and Gilmore noted that the attacks occurred with "zero prior warning." Gilmore added, "It is fruitless to try to predict any particular type of method in the absence of intelligence organization."

More interesting were the comments of Bremer and Huffman. Bremer said, "I can't honestly say what the impact would have been if our recommendations would have been followed. . . . It comes back basically to good intelligence," but "there is no way to do an analysis based on vulnerabilities in a free society." Huffman said, "I don't think all the recommendations would have made a difference. I think that what happened . . . was such a seismic change and really showed the terrorists to be of a very different order than we appreciated."