HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—*Tuesday, October 2, 2001*

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2001, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) for 5 minutes.

CURRENT AVIATION SECURITY SCREENING IS WOEFULLY INADEQUATE

Mr. DEFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, the House needs to move forward and quickly with a thoughtful and comprehensive transportation and infrastructure security package. It should not be just limited to aviation. There are other areas of vulnerability that go to other modes of transportation, whether they are transportation moving people or cargo, our pipelines, our dams, generating facilities, nuclear plants, a whole host of things.

For now the major focus is on aviation, and we are coming close to some agreement, but there is one vital issue still in disagreement on this package. There are a number of smaller items, but one in particular, and that is, who should be the front-line providers of aviation security at the airport? There is a whole host of places we need security.

There is what is called the backside or the airside of the airport. Access to the airplanes where people, things, contraband, could be smuggled on board, or weapons, that needs to be tightened up dramatically. Thirty-eight percent of the security breaches registered by the FAA in the last 2 years related to screening at airports.

Now, this is extraordinarily variable across the United States. Some airports, my little airport in Eugene, the screeners there do a very good job. They are very upset with me because of pushing for federalization and standardization of this, but other airports are a disaster, and we cannot allow those disastrous breaches and problems to continue.

With whom do we want to continue the current system of private contracting? We already have, documented for decades, problems with the private contracting firms. Most recently, and outrageously, we have aviation safeguards at Miami International Airport, where the manager was falsifying background checks. The company was fined more than $110,000, put on 5 years probation. The manager was sentenced to 5 years in Federal prison, and guess what, they are still providing the security screening at Miami International Airport.

Then we have Argenbright Security, which does Boston, Newark and Washington. That company paid a $1.2 million fine for doctoring records and allowing convicted felons to work at the Philadelphia airport but Miami international officials said they were satisfied with the company's work.

That is the status quo. Those are the most outrageous examples. Then we have the common examples, the fact that 90 percent of the screening personnel in the United States, unlike at my little home airport, where people stay in their jobs for years, 90 percent have less than 6 months experience because these are at all the major airports, the lowest paid entry level positions into the airport.

We had testimony to that effect almost 2 years ago, when the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) and I first proposed making these into Federal law enforcement positions where the people would be well paid, well trained, and we know they would be subjected to a thorough background check by the Federal Government, not by some private firm that sometimes has falsified those documents.

The turnover at Boston Logan Airport among screeners last year, 207 percent; Houston, 237 percent; Atlanta, 375 percent; St. Louis, 416 percent. The screener of the year 2 years ago named by the private security companies came from St. Louis. He came before our committee and said, you know, Congressman, I am really lucky. I love this job and I can afford to do it. I said, well, what do you mean you can afford to do it? He said, well, I do not have to live on the income they pay. Nobody could live on that income. He said, I have got outside sources of income. I own some rental properties and I have got a little bit of other income so I can do the job. But everybody else, they look at it as a way to work up to McDonald's or Burger King, or maybe even really the top of the scale, cleaning the airplanes.

This is not right. These people are the front line. They should be like INS, like Customs, and yes, like agriculture, where they are uniformed Federal law enforcement personnel with the right to question and detain people who might present a threat. We know they are professionally trained, they are paid well and we get rid of this turnover and the problems with the background screening.

This is the major item in contention. We cannot be blinded. I have actually had colleagues say you know what we should do, we should privatize this, and I said guess what, it has been privatized, it has been supervised by the FAA although the new rules for screening companies were delayed for about 6 years. Not because of just bureaucratic intransigence at the FAA, but because the security companies, the airlines, the Air Transport Association, and many others designed to delay those rules for years because they knew the new system would be more expensive and would be a little bit better than what we have today, but would still not be as good as a uniform, Federalized system.

That is where we need to go to assure the traveling public, and then we have to look at all the other issues that relate to aviation and other modes of transportation.

BERLIN CONFERENCE ON TERRORISM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BALLENGER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to come to the floor today to spend a few minutes providing a very preliminary report on the status of our worldwide coalition against terrorism.

Last week, I traveled to Berlin, Germany, to join leaders of our allied nations from around the world for the first international conference on terrorism since the attacks on New York and Washington. The conference included representatives from Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Korea, Japan, Ireland, Israel, and even Jordan. I was privileged to lead a discussion with His Royal Highness, Prince Hassan of Jordan, and with Nobel Laureate David Trimble of the United Kingdom.

During our meetings with America's strongest allies around the world, I arrived at four basic conclusions about our allied response to these terrorist attacks.