

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Ms. Wanda Evans, one of his secretaries.

SECURE TRANSPORTATION FOR
AMERICA ACT OF 2001

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THORNBERRY). Pursuant to House Resolution 274 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 3150.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 3150) to improve aviation security, and for other purposes, with Mr. HASTINGS of Washington in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Chairman, I have a long prepared statement which I will submit for the RECORD, but I would ask my colleagues today to think about this legislation very strongly. I have talked privately with the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI), and they say that the bill that they are proposing does not do the job. That tells me one thing: the bill that they are promoting does not do the job, and this bill does.

We worked very closely to get a bill and came very nearly to having a bill. Some people did not see it that way. But my main goal was to have the best security bill for our people. I believe my bill does that. It is not perfect, but I can tell my colleagues the Senate bill is nowhere as near as my bill.

If my colleagues vote for the substitute, which some of my colleagues are planning on doing, they are not going to have a conference. That has already been decided. It will be on the President's desk, and the American people will be told by certain people that they will be secure in their airports, but we will have the exact same system that is in place right now, which has failed miserably. All of my colleagues know that.

This has become a political football, and I stayed out of that, because I want the best security for the people of America.

I want to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), who has done an outstanding job, and the staff has done a good job on this issue and, yes, the President of the United States. All he is asking us to do and what my bill does is give him some flexibility. My bill does not federalize, it does not nationalize, it is not a total requirement. But it is a brand new era, a time where we need good security. In all good conscience, there is no way that a substitute is going to be offered that I could even vote for that legislation, because we are kidding the American public.

The Senate keeps referring to a 100 to zero vote. I have had Senate Democrats and Republicans come to me and say, my God, we have to go to conference. And I have had a few people say to me, we will have to straighten this out later on. That is not good legislation. This is the House of the people, not the Senate. To have to accept a Senate bill to me is deplorable. It is beneath us. It is the wrong thing to do.

I do not believe there is a fairer person in this Congress than myself working with each individual. My heart is very deeply in the idea of security. If we do not pass this bill today of mine and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), we are doing a great disservice to the American people, because they will go to the airport and say, oh, my God, we are now safe because we have passed a bill, and in reality there is no safety in the substitute.

Mr. Chairman, it disturbs me how this thing got so far out of hand that we cannot solve the problem correctly. We must go to conference. We can solve it in conference where the problems are different, but if we do not go to conference, we have nothing and we have kidded the public. I am not about to, and I was accused today of not being a statesman because I said I probably will not review this issue again because my colleagues have made the decision if I lose that they have a safe bill and the people of America are safe. I can tell my colleagues from the bottom of my heart, my colleagues know they are not, and I will not be a part of kidding the American public about how secure they will be if we adopt the substitute. We have to accept the Young-Mica bill for the best for the people of America.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 3150, the Secure Transportation for America Act of 2001.

H.R. 3150 is the result of a great deal of hard work by our aviation subcommittee and its chairman, JOHN MICA.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for his efforts and the hard work of the aviation subcommittee on this issue.

Chairman MICA and the members of the aviation subcommittee held hearings and conducted extensive research to find out which system of security would work best for our aviation transportation needs.

The American people have every right to be concerned and worried about the inadequate level of security provided at our airports.

This bill will dramatically increase the level of security and will dramatically change the way the system has operated at our airports.

Under the current system, the airlines hire the security screeners at the airports using low cost, low bid security companies.

The airlines in the past have worked to reduce their costs by driving down the cost of airline security. Unfortunately, this has resulted in a low paid, poorly trained and poorly motivated workforce.

I want to make it abundantly clear. This bill changes all of that.

Low paid, poorly trained and poorly motivated screeners in charge of our nation's air security is simply unacceptable.

Under our bill, H.R. 3150, the federal government will take over the job of screening passengers and their baggage at our airports.

It will become a federal government responsibility.

Where we differ with some of our colleagues is how do we best achieve the goal of a truly secure federally controlled aviation screening process.

We do it by insuring that it is the federal government that will set the compensation for the screeners.

It is the federal government that mandates the level of competency and training for the screeners.

It is the government that runs the background checks and works with other agencies to insure that these screeners have a clean record.

And if the screeners don't do their job and perform well, under our bill they can be removed, their certificates can be revoked, and the entire company can be fired and fined for any violations of the rules or regulations.

Our bill gives the President the tools he needs to insure the best possible security for our country.

H.R. 3150 however, does more than just improve airport screening.

It establishes broad authority to deal with threats to all transportation modes, by setting up a new Transportation Security Administration within the Department of Transportation.

The new administration will be headed by an undersecretary whose only job will be to protect our transportation system from terrorists threats.

H.R. 3150 requires the undersecretary of the Transportation Security Administration to assume all responsibility for aviation security within 3 months of final passage of the bill.

Under our bill the undersecretary could assume responsibility even earlier if the transition can be worked out with the airlines.

Unlike the Senate bill and the amendment to be offered, H.R. 3150 does not tie the President's hands by requiring that airport security screeners be 100 percent federal employees.

However, let me make it clear.

Our bill federalizes the screening process.

However, the issue is not federal versus non-federal employees conducting the screening of passengers and their bags.

The real issue is how to achieve the highest level of security for the traveling public, particularly within the next few months while we