

The question is not whether federal employees often succeed against the odds; they do. Rather, the question is whether the federal government can find a private workforce that can outperform federal employees on anything other than fast hiring and firing.

The answer is mixed at best.

Private airport-security contractors can hire quickly, but they're poor at retaining. From 1998 to 1999, turnover among private contractors at the 19 largest U.S. airports averaged 126%, topped 200% at five and hit 416% at Lambert-St. Louis International.

Private contractors also have trouble complying with existing regulations. Just last year, one of the largest contractors, Argenbright Security, was fined more than \$1 million for assigning new employees to its screening check-points in Philadelphia without background checks or an audit system to detect what the U.S. attorney's office called "the astonishing and widespread criminal activities that occurred in this case."

In the best of all worlds, private contractors would hire and supervise federal employees, avoiding an awful civil-service hiring and firing system that hasn't been reformed in decades. But given a choice between the two workforces, federal employees should get the job. No matter how stringent the oversight, airport security is too important to consign to the lowest bidder. That is how the security function fell into disrepair in the first place.

[From the Chicago Sun-Times, Nov. 5, 2001]

COPING WITH NEW TENSIONS
O'HARE ARREST TIED TO TERROR?
(By Susan Dodge)

A Nepalese man arrested at O'Hare Airport over the weekend with several knives, a stun gun and a can of Mace gave police the same home address that belonged to a suspect questioned in the Sept. 11 terrorist hijacking investigation.

But authorities were vague on whether there was any connection between Subash Gurung, who was arrested Saturday night at O'Hare, and Ayub Ali Khan, who is being held as a material witness to the attacks. Khan was one of two men with box cutters taken into federal custody Sept. 12 on a San Antonio-bound Amtrak train.

ABC-7 reported Sunday night that Gurung was being questioned for a second time by FBI officials.

He listed 1025 W. Hollywood, a Chicago apartment building, as his home address. Khan is believed to have lived at the same address for a time, authorities said. Khan, 34, is being held in a federal detention center in New York City.

Seven O'Hare Airport security workers—including a supervisor—who allegedly let Gurung pass through their checkpoint were fired Sunday, Chicago Aviation Department spokeswoman Monique Bond said.

Gurung was within minutes of boarding a United flight to Omaha, Neb., Saturday night when the stunning security breach was detected by airline employees who searched his carry-on bag, where the weapons were located, officials said.

Security officials confiscated two knives at a security check-point, but Gurung made it to the boarding gate with seven other knives, a stun gun and Mace in his carry-on, said Bond.

Police Supt. Terry Hillard and Thomas J. Kneir, head of the local FBI office, spoke about Gurung's arrest but decided they could not charge him with a federal crime "because he didn't board an airplane," said Chicago police spokesman David Bayless.

Gurung was arrested Saturday and charged with three misdemeanors: unlawful use of a weapon, attempting to board an aircraft with a weapon and carrying a dangerous weapon, said Chicago Police Officer Matthew Jackson, a department spokesman.

Exactly how did the 27-year-old Edgewater resident make it through the terminal checkpoint, which supposedly is more secure since the terrorist attacks?

"That's the million-dollar question," Bond said Sunday.

Equally uncertain was why Gurung was allegedly carrying the items.

The Federal Aviation Administration, the city's aviation department and United Airlines all were investigating the security breach.

United gate employees checked Gurung's carry-on bag as a random bag search, part of the airline's enhanced security measures, said United spokesman Joe Hopkins.

Gurung was questioned by the FBI and then released on bond early Sunday, police said. The FBI declined to comment Sunday, referring all questions to police.

Gurung 27, told police that he's unemployed and originally from Nepal. He is scheduled to appear in court Dec. 19.

The breach was the latest by Argenbright Security Inc., which operates the checkpoint for United and has been roundly criticized for lax security and hiring workers with criminal backgrounds.

It came as Congress debated how to tighten airport security. The security lapse bolsters the case for making airport security workers federal employees, who would be higher paid and better trained, Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin said, adding, "You can't do it on the cheap."

But House Republican leaders argue that federalizing the security would expand bureaucracy and make it tougher to fire bad workers. House and Senate officials are expected to come up with compromise legislation on airport security.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VISA ENTRY REFORM ACT

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong support for S. 1267, the Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001. I am pleased to be an original cosponsor and to have contributed to the drafting of this important immigration control measure.

This bill will help America get back control of our borders. Illegal immigration has long been a serious problem in our country. Census data indicates that there are now about 7 or 8 million illegal aliens in the United States, and the problem is getting worse. This is at least double the number of illegals that were here in 1990.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 have demonstrated how dangerous it

can be for us to fail to know who is coming into our country. Of the 19 men who apparently hijacked the commercial airliners on September 11, the Director of Immigration and Naturalization Service last month testified that his agency had no record of how some of them came to the United States.

The legislation would create one centralized database of all noncitizens. It would be updated as aliens entered and left the United States through a modern system of quickly swiping a card at border crossings.

Also, the database would be integrated with law enforcement and intelligence information so that all relevant agencies could share and have access to critical data. Moreover, all airlines, cruise ships, and cross-border bus lines would have to submit passenger manifests prior to departure so that foreigners could be pre-screened on the database before their arrival.

This bill would help address the rampant problem of document fraud, especially for immigration documents. It would require that all Federal identification and immigration papers, including visas and social security cards, be fraud and tamper-resistant. Using modern technology, immigration documents would have to contain biometric data, such as photographs and fingerprints.

Further, the legislation would impose greater controls on foreigners who are here on student visas. It is noteworthy that, according to media reports, one of the hijackers from September 11 came into this country on a student visa but did not attend classes. This bill would help prevent this problem by requiring schools to report quarterly to the INS on the student's classes and whether he or she had problems with law enforcement during that period. If a foreign student dropped out, or failed to register or attend classes, the school would be required to notify the INS immediately. Further, background checks would have to be conducted prior to visas being issued, and additional background checks could be done when visas were renewed. The increased government costs for the student reforms would be paid in part through increased application fees for foreign students.

Another important provision would prohibit any visas from being issued for students from terrorist countries. While this is a significant first step, I believe we need to go further in the future and prohibit any visas from being issued to terrorist nations, except for limited refugee and humanitarian reasons.

One provision of the bill that was included at my request requires a General Accounting Office study on returning to annual registration of aliens. Annual registration is needed to determine whether temporary aliens are actually here for the reasons they were