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Week Ending Friday, November 23, 2001

Remarks on Signing the Aviation and Transportation Security Act

November 19, 2001

Thank you all very much. Today we take permanent and aggressive steps to improve the security of our airways. The events of September the 11th were a call to action. And the Congress has now responded.

The law I will sign should give all Americans greater confidence when they fly. All Members of Congress care deeply about this issue. Despite divergent views, the Congress worked closely with my administration to develop a bipartisan conclusion that will help protect American air travelers.

I want to thank the House and Senate leadership for their patience in this issue. I want to thank the Speaker and the minority leader; the leader of the Senate, Senator Lott; for working hard to make sure this bill came to fruition.

I also want to thank Chairman Don Young and John Mica and Jim Oberstar who have joined us today from the House. I want to thank you for your hard work. And I want to thank Members of the United States Senate: Chairman Hollings and John McCain and Kay Bailey Hutchison for their hard work.

I appreciate so very much the Secretary of Transportation and his steadiness and his ability to bring confidence to the process. I picked a good man in Norm Mineta, who is rising to the occasion.

I also want to thank his deputy, Michael Jackson, for his hard work. As well, I appreciate Jane Garvey joining us up here today. I see other Members of Congress who are here. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate you doing the right thing for America.

I also want to thank the pilots and flight attendants and the people of the airline industry who have joined us today. I want to thank you for your courage in the face of terror. I want to thank you for inspiring confidence amongst the American people.

The broad support for this bill shows that our country is united in this crisis. We have our political differences, but we're united to defend our country. And we're united to protect our people. For our airways, there is one supreme priority: security.

Since September the 11th, the Federal Government has taken action to raise safety standards. We've made funds available to the aviation industry to fortify cockpits. More Federal air marshals now ride on our airplanes. The Department of Transportation instituted a zero-tolerance crackdown on security breaches.

Our National Guard protects us in our airports. And I want to thank the National Guards men and women who will be working the holiday season. I want to thank them for being away from their families, thank them for providing more security for people who travel.

I appreciate the work the airlines have done with the Federal Aviation Administration. The airlines have started intense nighttime security sweeps of aircraft. They've tightened background checks for employees and implemented nondiscriminatory government-approved criterion for identifying passengers who require additional security.

Now, we take the next important step. For the first time, airport security will become a direct Federal responsibility overseen by a new Under Secretary of Transportation for Security. Additional funds will be provided for Federal air marshals, and a new team of Federal security managers, supervisors, law enforcement officers, and screeners will ensure all passengers and carry-on bags are inspected thoroughly and effectively. The new security force will be well trained, made up of U.S. citizens. And if any of its members do not perform, the new Under Secretary will have full authority to discipline or remove them.

At the same time, we will adopt strict new requirements to screen checked baggage, to tighten security in all other areas of airports, and to provide greater security for travelers by bus and by train. This bill sets a one-year deadline for the transition to the new system. It gives my administration the flexibility we need to make that transition work.

Ultimately, this bill offers local authorities the option to bring in outside experts—a method that's worked well in Israel and Western Europe—provided those outside experts can meet our rigorous new safety standards and requirements.

Security comes first. The Federal Government will set high standards, and we will enforce them. These have been difficult days for Americans who fly and for American aviation. A proud industry has been hit hard. But this Nation has seen the dedication and spirit of our pilots and flightcrews and the hundreds of thousands of hard-working people who keep America flying. We know they will endure. I'm confident this industry will grow and prosper.

The holidays will soon be here. Even after the last few months, we have much to be thankful for. We have a great country. We're a great people. We have our faith, our families, and our friends. And, thanks to this bill, we have a new commitment to security in the air. And that's good news, as Americans travel to celebrate this season with their loved ones.

It is now my honor to sign this important piece of legislation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:53 a.m. in the lobby of Terminal A at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. S. 1447, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 107–71.

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony

November 19, 2001

Thank you all. Please be seated. Good afternoon, and welcome to the White House. I'm not going to speak too long, because our guest of honor looks a little nervous. Nobody's told him yet that I'm going to give him a pardon.

We're especially glad that so many of the young can come today. Thank you all for being here. In a few moments, you can come up and pet the turkey if you want to.

Nick Weaver and Stuart Proctor of the National Turkey Foundation are here, and I want to thank you both for being here—honored you're here. Actually, you probably don't know this, but there were two turkeys brought to Washington for this occasion. By custom, an alternate is always on hand to fill in if needed.

This one right here—his name is Liberty. And the other turkey, the alternate, his name is Freedom. Now, Freedom is not here because he's in a secure and undisclosed location. [*Laughter*]

This White House tradition dates back to Abraham Lincoln. Probably what you don't know is that Abraham Lincoln had a son named Tad who kept a turkey as a pet. I thought about trying to keep the turkey as a pet, but I don't think the two dogs and the cat would like it.

From our very beginnings, gratitude has been a part of our national character. Through the generations, our country has known its share of hardships. And we've been through some tough times, some testing moments during the last months. Yet, we've never lost sight of the blessings around us: the freedoms we enjoy, the people we love, and the many gifts of our prosperous land.

On this holiday, we give thanks for our many blessings and for life itself. Thanksgiving reminds us that the greatest gifts don't come from the hands of man, but from the Maker of heaven and Earth.

This week American families will gather in that spirit. We will remember, too, those who approach the holidays with a burden of sadness. We think especially of families that recently lost loved ones and of our men and women in the Armed Forces serving far away from home.

This is a Nation of many faiths. And this holiday season we'll all be joined in prayer that those who mourn will find comfort, that those in dangers will find protection, and that God will continue to watch over the land we love.

I now have the duty of ending the suspense of our feathery guest. For this turkey and