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No Need for Maoist-Style Airport ‘Security’

Senate’s measure to enhance security at airports looks more and more like a five year Maoist plan.

WASHINGTON — Recent news of the tragic crash of Flight 587 in Queens, New York, has bolstered the case of politicians who seek statist reform of airport security. Whether the crash were an accident or an act of terror is yet to be seen. But **rash acts by Congress to “fix” systemic airport security problems will be felt by Americans for years to come, and under these circumstances, cool reason must triumph over the cause of impulsive reform.**

Two key bills in Congress exemplify these better- and worst-case scenarios. The better scenario, House bill 3150, would enhance security by creating federal certification requirements for airport baggage screeners. The screening process would be subject to federal standards, federal supervision, and strict federal oversight. The worst-case scenario is the Senate version, which would make all 28,000 baggage screeners federal employees. This is the major difference between the House and Senate bills.

“Under these circumstances, Congress should resist the impulse to nationalize airport security,” said taxpayer advocate Grover Norquist, who heads Americans for Tax Reform, a public interest advocacy group. **“Making federal employees out of airport baggage handlers won’t make them better workers – but it will make them much harder to fire.”**

Rather than give in to the knee-jerk urge to nationalize airport security, the debate in **Congress should take into account what has worked in other countries.** **Closer examination reveals that there are a whole host of countries that have tried and rejected the Senate approach of federalizing baggage screeners.** Terrorist events in the 1970s and 1980s forced governments in Europe and Israel to re-evaluate aviation security, with the eventual outcome of implementing private-sector security improvements.

“The only existing system of federalized airport security conducting baggage screening is in China,” said Damon Ansell, Vice President for Policy at ATR. **“The Senate over-reacted and chose the Chinese system to model aviation security reform; the House chose the direction that Israel and Europe took after their nationalized airport security workforces failed to prevent terrorist attacks.** The Israeli-European model has proven effective without the costs of federalizing everyone who works at an airport, and the House should move to adopt these time-tested measures,” Ansell concluded.

Americans for Tax Reform is a non-partisan coalition of taxpayers and taxpayer groups who oppose all federal and state tax increases. For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Jonathan Collegio at (202) 785-0266 or by email at jcollegio@atr.org