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# Senate Approves a Bill To Federalize Screeners

By LIZETTE ALVAREZ

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 — With sponsors calling air travel a national security matter, the Senate today unanimously passed legislation intended to make flying safer by federalizing the job of passenger and baggage screening at major airports and requiring that all suitcases and bags be examined.

The legislation, which passed on a vote of 100 to 0 but which faces resistance in the House, would create a new Justice Department work force of 28,000 people to handle the task of screening passengers, checked luggage and carry-on bags at 142 major airports.

At smaller airports, the government would have the option of using either the new workers or, at federal expense, state and local law enforcement officers, who would undergo the same rigorous training as the federal screeners.

The job of screening is now contracted out by the airlines to low-bidding security companies, which pay many screeners the minimum wage. The airlines support the bill, which would require passengers to pay a \$2.50 surcharge on each ticket to cover the cost of the security overhaul. The bill does not specify what the federal screeners would be paid.

"This is a function of government," said one author of the legislation, Senator Ernest F. Hollings, the South Carolina Democrat who heads the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. "No one is putting in measures to privatize the Capitol police or the Secret Service. We are going to give some protection to the traveling public."

Mr. Hollings's co-author was Senator John McCain of Arizona, the committee's senior Republican, who said of the move to create a new federal work force: "As a proud fiscal conservative, I do not advocate this move lightly. But the attack last month was an act of war, and we must respond accordingly."

The Bush administration had earlier indicated that it could support the bill despite preferring legislation that would limit the government's new role at airports to security oversight rather than hands-on screening.

While commending the Senate for acting, the White House said in a statement tonight that President Bush "has serious concerns that full federalization of the screener work force" could cause significant problems. Mr. Bush's transportation secretary, Norman Y. Mineta, told lawmakers last week that the transition to a new work force could prove chaotic.

Most Republican senators, wary of expanding the government, fought for the White House position for more than a week, then voted for the bipartisan Senate bill anyway.

But the legislation's prospects appear uncertain in the House, where Republican leaders, led by Representative Tom DeLay of Texas, the majority whip, vehemently oppose any effort to turn screeners into federal employees. Mr. DeLay lacks the votes to pass the White House version of the bill, however, and so legislation is stalled for now.

"We know that the Europeans and Israelis both attempted to provide airline security through complete government control," Mr. DeLay said. "They all walked away from that flawed approach in the 1980's, when airline security failed to improve."

Still, the Senate is hoping that its unanimous approval of the bill, coupled with Democratic pressure, will spur the House to pass a similar measure.

The legislation aims to renew consumer confidence in air travel by requiring steps to prevent hijackers from boarding and taking control of planes as on Sept. 11.

Chief among the requirements is the federalized work force, whose members could be fired or suspended by the Justice Department and, regardless of Civil Service laws, would not be permitted to strike.

Among other changes that the bill would mandate is the X-raying of all baggage, including checked luggage, before it gets on the plane; prior to last month, only some bags were X-rayed.

The Senate's adoption of this provision came against the backdrop of an unsettling finding by the Transportation Department's inspector general. Although the Federal Aviation Administration recently placed new bomb detection machines inside 50 airports, inspections in the last week at 7 of the nation's 20 highest-risk airports found that most airlines were not complying with new federal orders to scan all checked baggage for explosives, the inspector general said today. The inspector general did not identify the airports.

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*A measure that goes beyond what the president wanted.*

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Another provision of the bill would require airport workers with access to restricted areas to undergo criminal background checks. Further, armed law enforcement officers would supervise the screening process, and monitor planes on the tarmac.

The bill initially placed the baggage screening process in the hands of the Transportation Department, but it was amended today to give the Justice Department instead the responsibility for hiring, training, supervising and employing the screeners. The cost, \$1.2 billion to \$2 billion a year, would be covered by the passenger surcharge. It could take at least six months to hire and train the new workers.

Airplanes would be fitted with reinforced cockpit doors accessible only to pilots, and any attempt to enter the cockpit would require the pilot to radio in and land the plane at the nearest airport. The bill would also expand a program that places armed federal marshals on planes. And it would authorize the F.A.A. to allow pilots to carry guns.

Earlier in the day, the Senate defeated an amendment that would have expanded unemployment benefits and provided 12 months of health insurance premiums for workers laid off by the airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturers and airline suppliers.

Because of a Republican filibuster against it, the amendment needed 60 votes to pass. It drew 56, enough to prompt its supporters to say they would revive its provisions later.