

LARSON DEMANDS FEDERALIZATION OF AIRPORT SECURITY WORKERS

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today called on his colleagues to support the Democratic plan to place federal employees in charge of airline security rather than private companies who employ low paid, low skilled workers to screen passengers and baggage. Larson said that he would vote against the Republican version of security legislation, which would leave much of the current system in place and allows private firms to remain in charge of airport security. A similar bill to the Democratic plan, which would federalize airport security, passed the Senate 100 - 0. The House is scheduled to vote on the Republican version on Thursday.

Larson stated: "The current airport security screening process is tremendously inconsistent, and is conducted by private companies who often are simply the lowest bidders. These companies do not provide a high level of training for the low skilled, poorly paid personnel that screen passengers and baggage, and are plagued by high turnover rates. I strongly support the Democratic version of the Aviation Security Act that would make airport security the responsibility of the government, to ensure that a highly trained, highly skilled workforce is responsible for security and the safety of passengers. This is truly a matter of public safety and of national security; the current system is rife with inconsistency and is far from sufficient.

"For weeks, the Republican leadership in the House has held up this meaningful legislation which the United States Senate passed unanimously, and now are considering totally inadequate legislation which will not allow the current system to change to ensure the safety of passengers. In the same way no city or town would consider allowing their police force or fire department to be run by private corporations, we must take the responsibility of keeping our airports safe out of the hands of private corporations and poorly trained workers," said Larson.

The Democratic version would require screener applicants to pass a rigorous selection examination and complete both classroom and on the job training, these employees would not have the right to strike in keeping with federal law, and all baggage would be screened - including checked baggage. All air carrier, airport and screening personnel would be required to submit to background checks and checks of criminal history records. The legislation also authorizes the deployment of Federal Air Marshals on domestic and international flights, enhances cockpit security, mandates counter terrorism training for crews. The bill also requires individuals seeking flight instruction to submit to a background check and an Immigration and Naturalization Service review for foreign students.

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