
U.S. Representative

John Spratt

South Carolina # 5th District

News Release

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Spratt Backs Tougher Airline Security Bill

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) today voted for the tougher of two airline security bills being considered by the House, one that would make 28,000 airport security workers federal employees.

“Airline security is national security,” said Spratt. “When we fly out of Charlotte, or Columbia, or Greenville-Spartanburg, we should feel safe, confident that we have the best security we can get.”

Spratt said tests have shown that airline passenger and baggage screeners have been guilty of multiple security lapses, often missing weapons and fake bombs. The General Accounting Office (GAO) has testified that annual turnover of screeners at U.S. airports exceeds 120%, and turnover at some major airports approaches 400%.

“The current arrangement has failed dramatically,” said Spratt, “and has to be changed, root and branch. The best way to make these changes is to have the government take on the job of hiring, training, and managing the screeners, in effect making them federal law enforcement officers.”

The legislation Spratt supported also:

- expands the use of federal air marshals;
- requires that cockpit doors be strengthened and locked;
- allows pilots to carry guns if their airlines allow it;
- requires that flight crews get anti-hijack training;
- requires federal or state law enforcement officers at every screening checkpoint in an airport;
- requires background checks for persons authorized to enter secure areas of airports and increased security measures to keep out unauthorized persons;
- mandates background checks on persons seeking flying lessons or training through flight simulators; and

- requires that all U.S. and foreign airlines traveling to the United States provide a detailed passenger manifest to the U.S. government before landing.

The bill establishes a \$2.50 fee on passengers to pay for federal screening services (with any shortfalls to be made up by the airlines), and it authorizes \$500 million for cockpit and aircraft security improvements and \$1.5 billion to reimburse airports for the costs of heightened security measures imposed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. The bill supported by the House Republican leadership omitted any means of paying for the improvements it required.

“This bill sets up a strong, uniform system of screening across the nation,” said Spratt. “It says that airport security should be a law enforcement function, and staffed accordingly. Airline pilots and flight attendants and ground support personnel all supported it, and for good reason. It will help restore confidence in the safety of our airlines.”

The bill Spratt supports passed the Senate 100-0.

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