

John Kerry

U.S. Senator for Massachusetts

STATEMENT OF JOHN KERRY REGARDING: BUSH ADMINISTRATION PROPOSAL TO CUT AIR MARSHALS IN THE WAKE OF NEW AL-QAIDA SUICIDE BOMBING THREAT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, July 30, 2003

WASHINGTON, DC Senator John Kerry today blasted the Bush Administration for proposing to cut the number of air marshals in the wake of a new Department of Homeland Security warning about the possibility that al-Qaida may attempt more suicide bombings using commercial aircraft. According to media accounts, the Transportation Security Administration is seeking approval from Congress to cut \$104 million from the air marshal program to help offset a \$900 million budget shortfall, even though President Bush noted the threat of the possibility of hijackings during a White House news conference earlier today. Kerry, a co-author of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which created the Transportation Security Administration and the air marshal program, issued the following statement: I am deeply disappointed to learn that George W. Bush has compromised our Nations security by proposing to cut the number of air marshals at the very time that his Administration is highlighting a new threat from al-Qaida to use commercial aircraft in suicide bombings. That is illogical, irresponsible, and an ill-conceived notion of how to protect the American people. Protecting the American people requires leadership that goes beyond tax cuts and photo ops; it requires concrete action that recognizes we live in a different world post 9-11. Former Republican Senator Warren Rudman has recently issued a report pointing to an almost \$100 billion homeland security gap. Thats less than one-third of the recent tax cut for the wealthy. George W. Bushs latest action is just one more example of this administrations priorities, priorities that put small-minded penny-pinching and tax cuts for his campaign supporters ahead of making the tough choices and necessary investments in securing our homeland. Unfortunately, this is not the first instance of President Bushs indifference to the needs of protecting our homeland. He initially opposed the creation of a Department of Homeland Security, embracing the idea only when he could use it for political gain. He has under-funded the DHS, forcing cash-strapped states and localities to pick up the tab. And he has shortchanged first responders, the very men and women we will rely on to protect us in the unfortunate event of another attack. George W. Bush should exercise some leadership here and immediately order his appointees to restore the air marshals to the flights which need them most. More importantly, he should exercise some leadership by realizing that tax cuts for the wealthy take money away from the protection of the American people.-- 30 --

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Whistleblower Federal Air Marshal Robert MacLean v. Department of Homeland Security



Agency Overseeing Air Marshals Asks to Divert Program's Funds

Stephen Power

Eastern edition, New York, NY

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Jul 31, 2003

WASHINGTON -- The Transportation Security Administration asked Congress to cut money for the federal air-marshals program, prompting criticism from Democrats who point to recent warnings that al Qaeda may attempt more suicide hijackings sometime during the next few months.

The TSA wants permission to divert \$104 million from the program to help offset a \$900 million agency budget shortfall. The TSA said it has no plans to cut the number of air marshals -- a number the agency hasn't disclosed -- and said most of the proposed reductions are intended to slow down hiring of support staff and defer some training expenses until next year.

But the mere suggestion of possible cutbacks in the \$545 million program drew jeers from Democrats, including one of the party's presidential hopefuls, who said it illustrates a pattern by President Bush of shortchanging homeland-security needs. "He should exercise some leadership by realizing that tax cuts for the wealthy take money away from

the protection of the American people," said Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry.

TSA spokesman Brian Turmail said the agency's request wouldn't affect the air marshals' mission. Mr. Bush's secretary of homeland security, Tom Ridge, added "every available air marshal is being deployed and additional resources are being directed to this critical program." Still, the idea appeared to alarm some Republicans, following the government's warning to airlines this week of the possibility of hijack attempts. Government officials have said the alert was based on data gleaned from recent interviews with al Qaeda terror-network operatives held by the U.S., as well as communications intercepted by U.S. intelligence agencies.

"Given new warnings from [the Department of Homeland Security] about possible hijacking attempts, it is foolish to even consider cutting back the number of air marshals on commercial flights," said Rep. Harold Rogers, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, which oversees the TSA's budget. The Kentucky Republican said he would block any attempt to move money from the "core missions" of the program and added it is "foolish" to consider eliminating marshals. A spokeswoman for Mr. Rogers said later in the day that TSA officials never "indicated to us they were going to cut the number of air marshals on flights."

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