



July 30, 2003

Senator Clinton Reiterates Call on TSA to Justify Security Cuts at Nation's Airports

Recent reports of threats to airlines make proposed cutbacks even more disturbing

Washington, DC - Today, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (NY), in a letter to Admiral James M. Loy, Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration, reiterated her calls on the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to justify its decision to cutback on security personnel at the nation's airports. Additionally, Senator Clinton sent a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, expressing her concern that a loophole in U.S. immigration law may make it easier for terrorists to carry out their plans.

"At a time when news reports indicate that terrorists may again be plotting suicide missions to hijack commercial airliners on the East Coast, we should not be cutting airport screeners and law enforcement personnel at our nation's airports, and air marshals on our planes - we should be fighting them with every resource we have," said Senator Clinton. "We need to ensure that there are sufficient resources because we know that by having a strong defensive presence, we can actually deter terrorists from carrying out terrorists plots. I implore the TSA to reconsider the changes in the reduction of screeners and law enforcement personnel at our airports and air marshals in our planes. We need to be more vigilant, ever present, and prepared. The American people deserve no less."

Reports indicate that the Administration is planning to cut the number of screeners and law enforcement personnel at the nation's airports. There are also additional cuts proposed for the end of September. Some part-time screeners have been hired, but this is a half-measure and simply inconsistent with the nation's aviation security needs. Additional reports today indicate that the Federal Air Marshal Service has also cut training for Washington-area marshals and canceled critical flight missions because those missions would have required air marshals to spend the night at a hotel.

Further reports indicate that some airports, such as JFK, may have particular threat concerns because of the number of international passengers traveling to and connecting through those airports. Intelligence information indicates that terrorists were considering exploiting a visa loophole that would enable someone, without a U.S. visa, to take a flight from a country with less-stringent security to a US airport - as part of a layover - before taking a second connecting flight to the destination country.

In May of this year, Senator Clinton wrote to TSA Administrator Admiral Loy asking why proposed cuts in the screener workforce at New York airports appeared to be disproportionate to cuts made at other airports around the country. Two weeks later, Senator Clinton wrote to Admiral Loy again after learning about plans to reduce the number of law enforcement personnel at key screening checkpoints at our nation's airports. In early June, Senator Clinton also wrote Secretary Ridge raising these same issues. While Senator Clinton has received a response from both Admiral Loy and Secretary Ridge, she is not satisfied that enough is being done to protect our nation's airports.

[A copy of Senator Clinton's letters to Admiral Loy and Secretary Ridge are attached]

July 30, 2003

Admiral James M. Loy Administrator, Transportation Security Administration 400 7th Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Admiral Loy,

Thank you for your letter of May 19, 2003, regarding the screener reduction process. In my original letter to you, I expressed concern that New York State is bearing such a disproportionate share of cuts in airport screeners. I also wrote to Secretary Ridge with similar concerns.

I am still quite unclear about the proposed screener cuts and how exactly they will affect New York State. Although your response was helpful, it did not address exactly why New York seemed to be losing a greater percentage of screeners than other states. I would appreciate an explanation as to why New York, which has a high risk of terrorist activity and several border crossings, would face disproportionate screener cuts.

I have reviewed the newer planned cuts for screeners in order to attempt to determine the impact on New York. However, I understand those numbers include cargo screeners, which obfuscates the severity of the overall cuts. It is unclear to me exactly what kind of cuts will be made, and exactly why those specific cuts will be made. I know that part-time screeners will be used in some cases, but it is unclear how many and where.

I am writing to you to request a detailed explanation of all of these things. I would like to know how many screeners of all types, cargo and passenger, part-time and full-time, are at all New York airports now and how many will be there when you have completed your cuts. I would like to know how these numbers compare to nationwide numbers, and if there is a difference, I would like an explanation for that difference. Finally, I would like to know the exact method used to determine where cuts were to be made. Thank you for your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

Hillary Rodham Clinton

July 30, 2003

The Honorable Tom Ridge Secretary United States Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to express my concern about recent intelligence information reported in the press indicating that there are specific terrorist plots on the East Coast involving United States passenger airlines, and that a loophole in U.S. immigration law may make it easier for terrorists to act.

Specifically, I understand that intelligence information indicates that terrorists were considering exploiting a loophole in U.S. immigration law that would enable someone, without a U.S. visa, to take a flight from a country with less-stringent security to a U.S. airport and possibly roam that U.S. airport during a layover before taking a second connecting flight to the destination country. For this reason, a number of major international airports based in the U.S., including New York's John F. Kennedy airport, may have particular threat concerns because of the number of international passengers traveling to, and connecting through, those airports.

It was also reported that while some airports require passengers without U.S. visas to remain in a secured area during a layover, it is extremely discomfoting knowing that this is the most security that could be imposed on a possible terrorist. I would appreciate knowing at your earliest convenience what measures are being taken to address this issue and to improve security measures at our nation's airports.

I also want to reiterate my extreme concern with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) proposal, in the face of these serious threats, to cut the number of air marshals by canceling critical flight missions because those missions would have required air marshals to spend the night at a hotel. I understand that the TSA and the Department of Homeland Security have reconsidered this position. I hope that as long as our nation continues to face the threat of terrorism here at home - particularly when there is intelligence indicating specific threats - that the Department will do its utmost to provide the strongest aviation security possible.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely yours,

Hillary Rodham Clinton

CC: Anthony Coscia Chairman Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Joseph Seymour Executive Director Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

###

