

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
NEW YORK

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 27, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

The post-9/11 Intelligence Reform Bill is currently being held up in the House of Representatives, and I appreciate that the White House signaled this week that a compromise could be reached to overhaul American intelligence. As you may know, in addition to fundamentally restructuring the intelligence apparatus in the United States, this bill contains important provisions that will strengthen and improve the security of Americans who fly on commercial airlines, protecting travelers from potentially dangerous unchecked air cargo.

Approximately only five percent of the 2.8 million tons of cargo placed on commercial passenger aircraft are currently screened. The Transportation Security Administration has proposed new draft regulations that are currently in a public comment period, but unfortunately, these rules have several shortcomings including weakening the "known shipper program" by opening up the possibility of including unknown shipper cargo on passenger flights, not requiring fingerprint checks for cargo handlers, omitting and discussion of explosive detection systems for air cargo, and - perhaps most problematically - ignoring the 9/11 Commission's recommendation that passenger plans have at least one hardened cargo containers on passenger aircrafts to carry suspicious cargo.

To address some of these concerns, Senators Rockefeller, Snowe, Hollings and Lautenberg and I added an amendment to the Intelligence Reform Bill that requires the TSA to develop better technologies for air cargo security, authorizes funding for equipment and research and development, requires the Department finalize its air cargo regulations within eight months, and requires a pilot program to evaluate the use of currently available and next generation blast-resistant containers.

For this reason, I ask that you and all members of your Administration fully commit to finding a compromise on budgetary oversight issues that are holding up the Intelligence bill.

Mr. President, you and I agree that in order to win the War on Terror we need both a strong offense and a smart defense. While restructuring our intelligence systems will vastly strengthen our nation's offensive abilities, and the air security provision including in the Intelligence Reform Bill would be a key component in strengthening our defense as well.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator