

## Says he'll veto terrorist-fighting bill

# Bush could risk public safety in effort to keep unions at bay

WASHINGTON, D.C. —The Bush Administration says it will veto an anti-terrorist bill that would upgrade security on passenger and freight railroads, require all cargo carried on commercial passenger aircraft to be screened for bombs, and provide funds for state and local emergency communications systems — implement basically every recommendation proposed by a 9/11 panel following the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York.

Why on earth would the president veto a bill focused on making America safer?

Because it contains a provision that would allow transportation security officers (formerly known as airport screeners) to belong to a union. Some 43,000 screeners work under the authorization of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

In January, the House passed its version of the bill with collective bargaining rights included. The House vote was 299-128. All of Oregon's congressional delegation supported the bill, as did Southwest Washington Democrat Brian Baird.

In addition to workers' rights, the House bill also included language mandating inspection of all ship containers headed to the United States from overseas. The Bush Administration and many Republicans — at the insistence of Wal-Mart, which drops a container off at a U.S. port every 45 seconds — oppose that language.

On the issue of unionization, Bush and his supporters say that giving transportation security officers a voice on the job will compromise national security — even moreso than to allow foreign containers to enter the country unchecked.

"Collective bargaining will not work for our airports," said Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.). On March 6, DeMint introduced an amendment to the anti-terror bill that would have removed bargaining rights for trans-

portation security officers. DeMint said strengthening airport screeners' rights would hinder the government's flexibility to move them around in response to terrorist threats. Demint's amendment was defeated by a vote of 51-46.

[Oregon U.S. Senator Gordon Smith voted with DeMint to forbid union organizing.]  
Homeland Security Secretary

**'One only need look at 9/11. Unionized workers from both the public and private sector were first on the scene and worked tirelessly to restore what had been. Having union rights did not hamper response time or the ability to do their jobs...'**

AFGE President John Gage

Michael Chertoff said that screeners are as much on the front lines in the war against terror as military troops.

"Marines don't collectively bargain over whether they're going to wind up, you know, being deployed in Anbar province or in Baghdad," Chertoff told reporters after a briefing with senators. "We can't negotiate over terms and conditions of work that goes to the heart of our ability to move rapidly in order to deal with the threats that are emerging."

That's nonsense, said American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) President John Gage. "The notion that granting bargaining rights to [transportation security officers] would result in a less flexible workforce is just plain nonsense, and it is also an insult to the thousands of dedicated federal workers within Homeland Security, including the Border Patrol, FEMA, Federal Protective

Service and the Army Corps of Engineers.

"One only need look at 9/11. Unionized workers from both the public and private sector were first on the scene and worked tirelessly to restore what had been. Having union rights did not hamper response time or the ability to do their jobs, but instead it helped prepare them to be ready in case of emergency."

Gage said that due to a lack of job security, low pay and bad working conditions, along with favoritism, transportation security officers have a higher turnover rate than any other group of federal workers. They also lead all federal workers in injury rates and discrimination complaints.

"This very important amendment will provide stability to the workforce TSA and the flying public so desperately need," Gage said.

Under the House proposal, the security officers would not have the right to strike, and the union would not have the power to negotiate wages — those would be set by Congress. But the union would be authorized to bargain on their behalf to establish work rules to govern overtime and temporary transfers and to protect them if they file a grievance.

Ironically, in five airports, as part of an experiment, private security firms run the screening — and those screeners can unionize.

In 2003, as TSA workers at several airports were getting ready to vote on joining AFGE, the Bush Administration, citing so-called "national security" concerns, terminated the screeners' collective bargaining rights. Congressional Republicans then blocked several attempts to restore them.

Since Bush took office, his Administration has attacked the collective bargaining rights of 850,000 Defense Department workers and more than 170,000 Homeland Security Department employees.

In November 2006, the International Labor Organization, an arm of the United Nations, ruled the Bush Administration violated the "fundamental" rights of airport screeners when it prohibited the workers from achieving union representation and engaging in collective bargaining.

"We're not going to let big labor compromise national security," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., noting there are not enough votes in either the House or the Senate to override a veto by President Bush. McConnell is married to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao.

## Unionists want health care aid for 9/11 rescuers in New York

By MARK GRUENBERG

NEW YORK (PAI) — Last year, John Sferazo, a member of Brooklyn Iron Workers Local 361 who helped clean up debris from the World Trade Center following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, went to the wake of a co-worker.

Sferazo got to the wake a little late, and only his colleague's family and close friends were there.

His friend, Mike, died of respiratory ailments contracted by breathing in toxic gases and debris from the clean-up of "The Pile" — ail-

ments like those that afflict Sferazo and thousands of other workers and New York area residents after the 9/11 attacks.

Sferazo saw a heart-rending scene which brought home the lasting impact of the attacks, not just on the workers who died at 9/11, but on those who are sick and dying from the toxic combinations unleashed when the Twin Towers collapsed: Ammonia, asbestos, particulates and other cancer-causing substances.

At the wake, Sferazo saw Mike's

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