



**One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

September 15, 2005

Docket Management System
U.S. Department of Transportation
Room Plaza 401
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Re: *Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport: Enhanced Security Procedures for Certain Operations; Interim Final Rule; Docket No. TSA-2005-21866*

Four years after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the return of general aviation operations to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (National) is an important development. As the ranking member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I have worked diligently to bring general aviation back to National. Therefore, I take great interest in the interim final rule (IFR) that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has developed to establish security procedures for general aviation flights into and out of National. The impact of this rule is also of interest to me as a representative of the state of Mississippi, where nearly 1,800 aircraft that range from small recreational planes to corporate business jets. After reviewing the IFR, I have a few comments about the plan for your consideration.

1) TSA should have an aggressive schedule for developing Phase II.

The interim final rule suggests a two-phased approach for restoring general aviation access to National. It is my understanding that after a year, the TSA plans to conduct a feasibility study to determine the timeline and ability to allow access to National for private persons. In subsequent discussions with my staff, I understand that that the feasibility study will not commence until a year after Phase I is initiated, that is October 15, 2006.

I strongly believe that a wider range of general aviation aircraft should be able to utilize the convenience of National then are allowed in Phase I of the rule. I encourage TSA to begin the feasibility study for Phase II well before October 2006 and discuss security options with affected general aviation

operators.

2) TSA should give consideration to smaller general aviation aircraft.

A common complaint I have heard is that TSA is limiting access to National to mostly the largest and most influential general aviation operators and Fortune 500 companies. I am supportive of charter operators and corporations with business and interests in the capital region having access to National but at the same time am concerned that the restrictions on Phase I may give the appearance of preferential treatment based on class, wealth, and influence. Smaller aircraft operators who are willing to undertake reasonable security measures should not be prohibited from accessing National. I encourage TSA to work toward a reasonable process that will allow flyers of all sizes to utilize National.

3) TSA should develop a formal process to consider modifications to the security requirements in Phase I.

After September 11, 2001, TSA instituted a number of special security measures for commercial aviation at National. With time and congressional input, TSA came to understand that many of these measures could be modified or abolished without jeopardizing security. I believe that TSA should take the lessons learned from its experience with commercial security measures at National and create a system, with a timetable, to review general aviation security requirements. This formal process should include discussions with the general aviation community to help identify procedures and restrictions that should be modified or removed. It should also result in an expansion of the number of flights and airports with direct access to National.

4) TSA should revisit the armed security officer provision in Phase I.

Under this rule, TSA requires general aviation operators to have an armed security officer on all flights with passengers. This provision does not seem necessary in circumstances such as a private corporate jet, where all the passengers are employees of the corporation are vetted and checked by TSA and known to the flight crew. In that case, the one individual not known to the flight crew would be the armed security officer. The absurdity of this requirement in such a situation warrants consideration. The necessity of this requirement should be carefully reviewed during the feasibility study for Phase II.

5) TSA should standardize the vetting process for general aviation pilots at National and the outlying general aviation airports (DC-3).

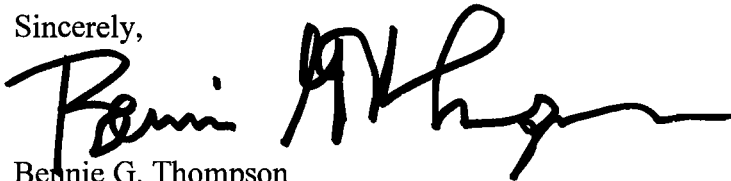
The procedures for vetting pilots under Phase I of the rule would allow

corporate pilots who want to fly into National to undergo the necessary fingerprinting, background check and training in their home state or online. However, private pilots that are not eligible to fly into National and want to land at one of the three outlying general aviation airports (Potomac, Hyde and College Park) must physically come to the District of Columbia to be fingerprinted, submit paperwork and receive permission to operate.

I cannot understand why a Mississippi pilot, who wishes to access one of the outlying airports, must come to the District to be vetted beforehand if pilots who are eligible to access National can take care of it on-line or in their home state. I strongly encourage TSA to develop a procedure so that pilots in outlying states can access the same or similar vetting process to the one established for general aviation at National.

I appreciate the opportunity to bring your attention to aspects of the rule that need refining and amplification. In my discussions with the general aviation community, I came to understand that there are reasonable steps that TSA and the Department of Homeland Security can take to keep the skies above our nation's capital more secure. I welcome the opportunity to work with TSA on a continuing basis to ensure that the policies and procedures for general aviation at National are reasonable and are not so burdensome that pilots choose to avoid Washington.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security