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NEWS BRIEFS

Transportation Security Administration Proposes Screening Private Jet Passengers

In a new, 260-page proposal, the Transportation Security Administration seeks to impose background check requirements on about 15,000 corporate jets and 315 small airports that currently have no security requirements. Although they are under no particular threat, the TSA claims that corporate jets could still be used in a terrorist attack, as they are the same size as commercial planes. The proposal would take effect next year at the earliest, to be phased in over two years. According to the TSA, this proposal would cost \$200 million a year, and corporate jet owners would pay about 85 percent of that. If enacted, the proposal would require passengers' names to be checked against a terrorist watch list, though regular corporate jet passengers, once cleared, would not have to undergo checks for future flights, according to Michael Morgan, TSA head of general aviation security. Corporate jet pilots would also have to pass criminal background checks, but passengers would not have to undergo physical screening. The proposal would not regulate the 150,000 smaller piston planes, though Andy Cebula, government-affairs chief for the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, warns that the TSA may try to regulate smaller planes in the future.

GOP Says Vandalism at Offices Prompts Beefed-Up Security

After some of its offices fell victim to vandalism, the Republican National Committee announced it will pay \$2 million for around-the-clock security at campaign offices across the United States. Party Chairman Robert M. Duncan said a McCain-Palin campaign office in Missouri was broken into and members of Acorn, an advocacy group that supports housing opportunities and voting rights for low- and moderate-income groups, apparently harassed campaign workers. Another incident involved vandals taking signs from the Republican Party headquarters in Rock Hill, S.C., and using spray paint to write "Republican means slavery" on the office's front door. At a campaign office outside Kansas City, Mo., somebody hurled a rock at a window and stole a laptop. At a Colorado campaign office, a letter containing white powder led to an anthrax scare, though the powder was not anthrax. In New Mexico, a campaign worker was physically attacked after attempting to prevent a man from vandalizing a McCain-Palin campaign sign. Vandals have also targeted the Barack Obama campaign, painting Ku Klux Klan and swastika symbols on an Obama billboard in Michigan and breaking glass windows and a door at a campaign office in Minnesota.

US Officials Fear Terrorist Links with Drug Lords

U.S. officials are concerned that Islamic extremist groups, including al-Qaeda, could partner with Latin American drug cartels to launch attacks on the United States. Intelligence suggests that extremist groups have already sent operatives to several Latin American countries to find logistical support and raise money. The Department of Homeland Security is concerned that support from the drug lords could allow terrorists to use smuggling routes to bring people or weapons of mass destruction into the country. "It is not in our interest to let that potpourri of scum come together," said Drug Enforcement Administration operations chief Michael Braun. The drug lords could also help terrorist organizations to launder money, obtain false documents and procure weapons. The Taliban previously used Afghanistan's heroin trade to fund terrorism, while the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia uses drug money to pay for supplies. Officials said that there is only a small chance that Islamic terrorists and Latin American drug kingpins will cooperate with one another, but the United States should still take steps to prevent an alliance. They recommended that the U.S. increase its cooperation with Latin American governments in order to give the DEA and other federal agencies the intelligence needed to identify and track drug kingpins and terrorists.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Keeping Wary Eye on Crime as Economy Sinks

Experts are concerned that the ongoing financial crisis will lead to an increase in crime. According to one sociologist, every recession since the 1950's has been accompanied by an increase in the crime rate. A recent survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum revealed that almost 40 percent of agencies said that the mortgage crisis had a negative impact on their department. However, some researchers believe that the increase in crime is not a direct result of the financial crisis, as the threat of crime should be the greatest when the economy is performing strongly and there are more potential victims. Instead, they argue that increased crime rates are a result of the law enforcement budget cuts that are required when local governments lose property tax revenue. The New York City government recently recommended \$94 million in cuts to the police department's budget. Former New York City police commissioner William J. Bratton, currently chief of the LAPD, said that crime rose in New York during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s because of a decision to lay off a large number of police officers. New York City police commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said that he has met with top commanders to discuss how current economic conditions could impact crime, though no new strategies have been implemented. According to Mike Blatman, crime prevention specialist at the Kennewick, Wash., Police Department, anecdotal evidence indicates that when the economy is in a downturn, retail theft rises. A new University of Florida study found that shoplifting cost American retailers around \$11.8 billion in 2007. Statistics show that big-box stores are usually the most affected by retail theft, says Wal-Mart spokesman Dan Fogleman. No matter the size of a store, experts caution that retail theft raises the cost of doing business, leads to increased prices, damages the economy, and may put small stores out of business. According to a recent estimate by the National Retail Federation, smaller retail companies spend an average of \$230,000 annually to combat retail theft, while large national retailers spend over \$1 million. A number of firms hire more security personnel, while many install closed-circuit TV and electronic security tags. Experts say employees can help reduce theft further by welcoming shoppers with a smile and asking if they need help.

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