

ON CAPITOL HILL

# Lawmakers reach deal on air security

By Mike Dornig  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Ending a long fight between Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate negotiators reached an agreement Thursday to bolster airport security and to replace the private contractors that screen passengers and bags with federal employees within a year.

The compromise, expected to be approved by Congress on Friday, is part of a larger overhaul of aviation security. Although few of the improvements would be in place in time for the busy holiday travel season, the agreement calls for sweeping changes in the way airline passengers are protected against hijackings and terrorist attacks.

The measure calls for cockpit doors to be fortified against attack and for pilots to be allowed to carry guns as a last-resort defense against intruders. All workers with access to airport tarmacs would have to pass criminal background checks under the bill. And within 60 days, all checked baggage is to be inspected before it is loaded onto a plane, although some congressional aides suggested carriers may be granted some

## Agreements reached on air security bill

### SECURITY PERSONNEL

- Federal employees in charge of security screening within one year at most airports.
- Airports can request that screening be handled by private contractors or law enforcement after three years.

### PLANE SECURITY

- More air marshals on planes
- Strengthens cockpit doors
- Pilots can carry guns

### OVERSIGHT

- Creates the Transportation Safety Administration in the Department of Transportation

### COST TO PASSENGERS

- \$2.50 per leg of a trip, with a maximum of \$5 per one-way trip

leeway on the requirement.

Also Thursday, United Airlines announced that it would arm its pilots with Taser stun guns, pending approval from the Department of Transportation. United is the first major carrier to take that step, al-

PLEASE SEE SECURITY, BACK PAGE

## SECURITY: Screeners would be federalized

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

though Mesa Airlines announced three weeks ago that it would do so.

"United and its pilots believe Tasers are an important addition to enhanced cockpit security," said Andrew Studdart, chief operating officer and executive vice president of United, based in Elk Grove Township, Ill. "Tasers will incapacitate an attacker without endangering the airplane."

The pistol-like devices, which would be kept in a lockbox in the cockpit, fire a wired dart that can incapacitate a person for up to 5 seconds.

The compromise hammered out by lawmakers, meanwhile, ends a political impasse that has dogged efforts to improve airport security in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

### Federalizing workers

The most contentious provision has been turning over airport screening responsibilities to a new federal security force, which will require putting about 28,000 people on the government payroll within a year. Senate and House Democrats supported the step, but House Republicans fought it as an unwarranted expansion of the federal government.

Under the agreement reached

Thursday, individual airports would be allowed to opt out of coverage by the federal security force after three years. Those airports then could contract with a private security firm, although each arrangement would have to be approved by the Transportation Department.

In the interim, up to five airports would be allowed to retain private contractors as security screeners under federal supervision as part of a pilot program.

### Passage predicted

Republican and Democratic congressional leaders predicted overwhelming support when the measure comes to a vote, scheduled for Friday in both chambers. And, even as negotiators continued to work out the details, President Bush announced that he would sign the measure into law when it reaches him.

Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta lauded the package as "a major milestone in the creation of a consistent, high-quality, nationwide aviation security force."

House Republicans said the provisions allow airports enough flexibility to abandon a government-administered security system if it proved ineffective, while Democrats said they considered the option a minimal concession.

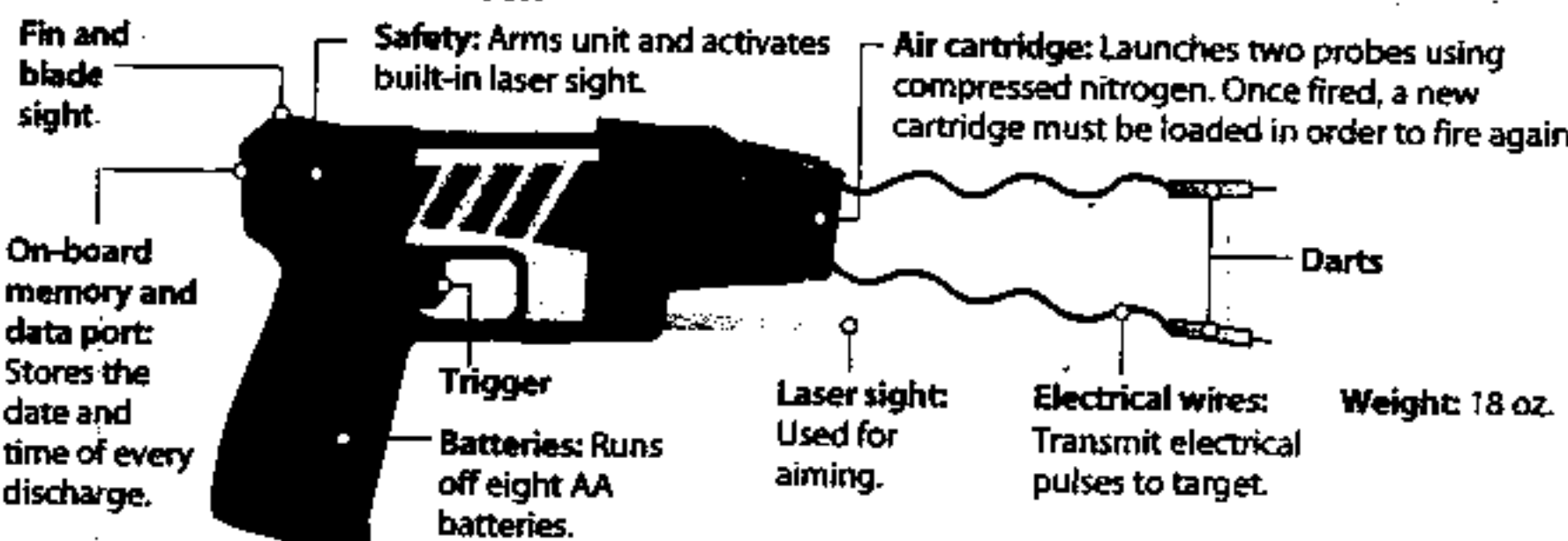
House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) said: "In the end, we're going to see what works best. We're going to see whether the private sector can best deliver this under federal supervision or you have to have federal screeners."

Although Chicago Mayor Richard Daley has said he pre-

## United seeks to arm pilots with stun guns

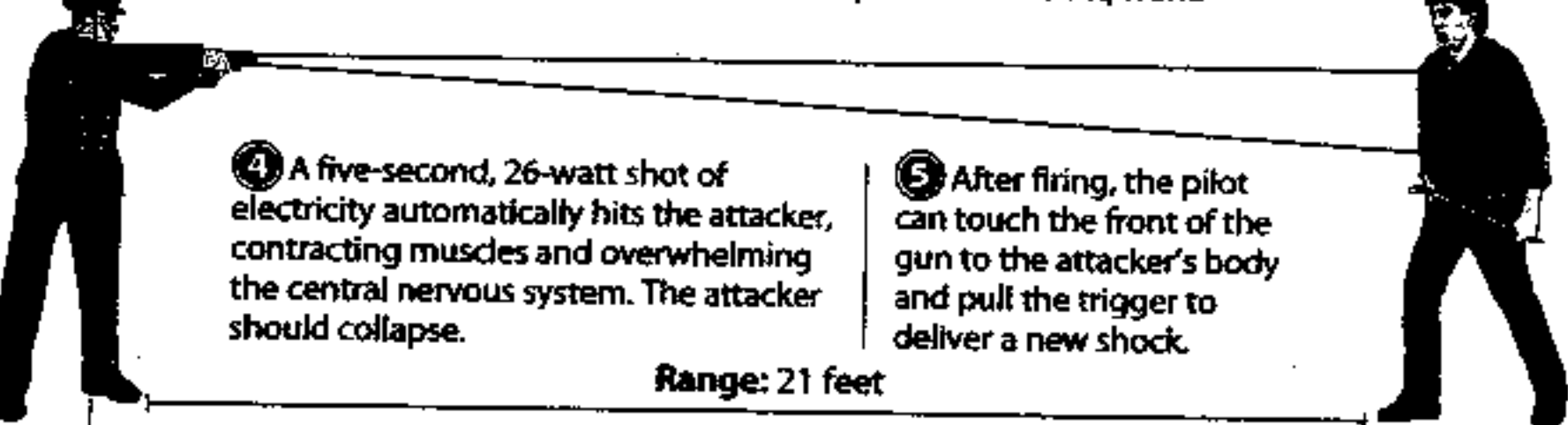
Pending government approval, United Airlines will start installing advanced Taser stun guns in the cockpits of all its planes. The weapon fires an electronic charge that disables an attacker for at least five seconds. Pilots would be trained to use the guns, which would be stored in a coded lockbox in the cockpit.

### THE ADVANCED TASER STUN GUN



### HOW IT WORKS

- 1 The pilot uses the laser sight to aim the stun gun.
- 2 When the trigger is pulled, a pair of quarter-inch darts trailing wires shoot from the gun.
- 3 The top dart hits the attacker where the gun is pointed. The other dart is aimed slightly lower. The darts do not have to penetrate flesh to work.



How the 21-foot range compares with the cabin of the Boeing 737-300.



Source: United Airlines, Taser International

Chicago Tribune/David Constantine and Charles Gary

fers to use private contractors for airport security, the city's aviation commissioner declined to say whether the city would apply to include O'Hare or Midway in the pilot program.

Congressional leaders have been under increasing pressure to move forward with airport security improvements, especially after a series of security lapses. Most notably, a Nepalese

man was caught this month with seven knives and a stun gun that airport screeners at O'Hare Airport missed.

Security screeners, who are provided by private contractors

hired by airlines, have been criticized for decades in federal audits for missing weapons when they were tested. Airport security screeners have suffered from low pay, low morale, poor training and high turnover.

The Air Transport Association, which represents major air carriers, withheld judgment on the congressional agreement until it sees the full package. ATA spokesman Michael Wascom said the group has concerns about the fee on passengers' tickets that would pay for the new security system. The improvements would be financed by a ticket tax of \$2.50 per flight segment, up to a maximum of \$5 per one-way trip.

### Travelers weigh in

Passengers interviewed at O'Hare Airport were generally supportive of the federal security screeners envisioned under the agreement.

"I think it's a good thing," said Pete Higgins, of Harrisburg, Pa., who was in Chicago for a fitness trade show. "I'm for privatization, but this is different, because in privatization you have to earn a profit. To learn this job [security screening] you have to pay them a decent wage. If government runs it, it would be able to pay higher salaries."

Under the agreement negotiators have worked out, the federal government will take over the contracts with private security companies as soon as possible but will have no more than three months to do so.

Tribune staff reporters John Hilkewitch, Rogers Worthington, Gary Washburn and Shila Kapos contributed to this report.