Written by **Veronika Kyrylenko** on November 15, 2021

Democrats Call on Biden to Impose Vax/Test Mandate for Domestic Flights

Dozens of Democrat lawmakers have urged President Joe Biden to impose a COVID vaccine mandate or proof of a negative test on Americans traveling by air as the holiday season approaches.

In a letter penned last week, 36 Democrats, led by Representatives Don Beyer (D-Va.) and Ritchie Torres (D-N.Y.), along with Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) asked the president to extend the "science-based requirements" already in place for international travelers coming to America to domestic travelers.

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The letter reads,

> As the nation approaches holiday season, we ask that you put in place requirements for airline passengers to provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 or a negative test to board a domestic flight…. This is a necessary and long overdue step toward ensuring all Americans feel safe and confident while traveling and reduce the chances of yet another devastating winter surge.

The signatories claim that many Americans are reluctant to spend extended periods of time in enclosed public spaces, such as airports and planes, out of fear of catching COVID. If everyone boarding the plane would prove they are fully vaccinated or have tested negative for COVID, such fears would be alleviated, the Democrats believe.

They added that this type of COVID vaccine and testing requirement "has been endorsed by prominent voices in the public health community," such as Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel.

The letter further argues that the measure would "be a valuable tool to support the recovery of the tourism and hospitality industries." The latter suffered significant financial losses during 2020, but the recovery is only possible "when American travelers are confident that they are safe during indoor activities, including when traveling, whether in airports or on the planes themselves," the Democrats state.

The coercive mandates imposed in the private sector have been a huge success in forcing people to receive a COVID shot, and such an approach should be applied to the domestic air travel, the letter stressed. To support the claim, the Democrats cited research by the Kaiser Family Foundation that has shown that unvaccinated people would be "significantly more likely" to get a jab if it was a requirement to fly on an airplane.

The letter closed with a praise to President Biden, who continues to "work tirelessly to finally end this pandemic." The legislators urged Biden to "ensure vaccine protocol is in place for domestic air travel so

that every opportunity has been taken to get eligible Americans vaccinated as quickly as possible."

While the Democrat legislators claimed that stripping unvaccinated Americans of their freedom of movement would prevent infections, the assumption is not supported by medical facts. Vaccinated people are able to spread the virus at similar rates to the unvaccinated (see here and here). Even the CDC admitted that back in July.

Last month, Senator Feinstein introduced the U.S. Air Travel Public Safety Act, which would require all passengers on domestic airline flights to either be fully vaccinated, have recently tested negative for COVID, or have fully recovered from the disease.

The Senator argued, "Ensuring that air travelers protect themselves and their destination communities from this disease is critical to prevent the next surge, particularly if we confront new, more virulent variants of COVID-19."

The bill would also require the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in collaboration with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), to develop "national vaccination standards and procedures related to COVID-19 and domestic air travel."

In September, Representative Beyer also introduced legislation called the Safe Travel Act that would require vaccinations or a negative COVID test within 72 hours of travel for domestic airlines and Amtrak trips. The bill would also require airport and Amtrak employees to show proof of vaccination or to submit to weekly COVID testing.

In August, Beyer's colleague and ally from New York, Representative Torres, submitted a bill that would ensure that only fully vaccinated passengers can travel by plane in the United States, with exemption to those who are ineligible or medically unable to be fully vaccinated against COVID.

Back in February, Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) introduced the Fly Safe and Healthy Act of 2021 that would require temperature checks at the airport as part of a pilot program. According to the bill, anyone with a fever would be subject to secondary medical screening for COVID. Those who do not pass the secondary screening would be prohibited from flying but would be allowed to reschedule their flights or to receive a voucher or a refund.

The Congressional Budget Office assumes that the bill will be enacted by the end of calendar year 2021.

The President's top medical advisor, Dr. Anthony Fauci, has been a vocal supporter of vaccine mandates for travelers. Back in September, he said, "I would support that if you want to get on a plane and travel with other people, that you should be vaccinated," and signaled that a plan to require proof of vaccination for domestic travel "is on the table for discussion."

Already, at least one state, Hawaii, requires vaccines or a negative COVID test for all airline travelers, including Americans.

U.S. Travel Association executive vice president of public affairs Tori Emerson Barnes spoke against a possible vaccine mandate for travelers, arguing that the proper tools for safe air travel are already in place, including the federal mask mandate that applies to public transportation and U.S. airports through January.

Prior to taking office, Joe Biden said COVID vaccines should not be mandatory.

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