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[Unnecessary Baggage](#)

By [Ryan Young](#) on 7.7.09 @ 6:07AM

Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.) thinks that your carry-on bags are a threat to national security. To address this grave threat, he has introduced the Securing Cabin Baggage Act (H.R. 2870). It would set a maximum size for all carry-on luggage at 22" x 18" x 10". Airlines would be allowed to set lower maximums if they wished to do so.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) would enforce the limit by setting up measuring templates at airport security checkpoints. If your bag doesn't fit, you'll have to check it.

Would any of this make airplane cabins more secure? Doubtful. As Cato Institute security expert Jim Harper says, the only way to prevent terrorism is to make terrorism difficult. With this law, all that any would-be terrorists would need to do is buy smaller luggage. Rep. Lipinski's bill doesn't make it any harder to sneak a weapon on board.

The security argument doesn't hold water. But supporters have another justification for it: convenience. A July 2 *New York Times* editorial made this argument by mocking a fictional passenger stuffing an oversized carry-on into an overhead bin: "If I Give This Footlocker a Half-Turn and Push Even Harder, Maybe in 20 Minutes Its Rigid Vertical Dimensions Will Magically Shrink, and Then I Can Sit Down and Let These Angry People Pass."

There's only one problem with this reasoning: United Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Airlines, Midwest Airlines, and other carriers already have size restrictions smaller than what Rep. Lipinski has proposed.

And yet the maddening spectacle of passengers trying to fit square pegs into round overhead bins still occurs. Presumably the measuring templates will reduce the problem. But the question needs to be asked: Does this problem really need a federal solution?

Then consider the added inconvenience. If your bag doesn't fit through TSA's template, you will need to go back to the airline's service counter to check your bag, pay for the

privilege, get back in the long security line, and hope you don't miss your flight. This is not convenient. It is, in fact, most decidedly *inconvenient*.

And all for what? Non-regulatory solutions already exist. If your carry-on is too big, then the airline can check your bag at the gate. It's not that big a deal.

At least not to you or me. But it could be a very big deal to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, a union that represents airline baggage handlers. Strictly enforced carry-on size restrictions could steer a lot of business their way -- almost certainly more than enough to recoup the \$10,000 they gave Rep. Lipinski last election cycle.

United Airlines also gave money to Rep. Lipinski. Now that they are charging for checked luggage, they could also see a windfall. Yes, they could strictly screen carry-on size themselves. But with the TSA doing it for them, United can deflect customers' ire away from itself.

The Securing Cabin Baggage Act would not make passengers safer. It would not make their lives more convenient. It is but another instance of organized labor and business interests extracting favors from government -- regulatory capture, in economics lingo.

The size of your carry-on luggage should not be a federal matter.

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