

# Tyler Morning Telegraph

## Privatize the TSA to improve safety

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The Transportation Security Administration fails every test it's given. It was a mistake to nationalize this function, even in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. It's time to privatize the TSA.

“Last week, agents at U.S. airport security checkpoints intercepted 45 guns, an assortment of knives and brass knuckles, and several deactivated hand grenades,” the Washington Post reports. “Two weeks ago, the count was 53 guns, and the week before that, it was 57... This week, the acting head of the Transportation Security Administration got bounced from his job because in 95 percent of test cases, real guns or fake bombs made it past the TSA.”

What's even more frustrating, the Post points out, is that “And if you've ever tried to slip through with a bottle of water, well, you probably got caught.”

The real problem, says Chris Edwards of the Cato Institute, is that the TSA is an unwieldy government bureaucracy.

“The unionized TSA has a history of inept management,” Edwards notes. “Reports in 2012 by various House committees found that TSA operations are ‘costly, counterintuitive, and poorly executed,’ and the agency ‘suffers from bureaucratic morass and mismanagement.’ Former TSA chief Kip Hawley argued in an op-ed that the agency is ‘hopelessly bureaucratic.’ And in 2014, former acting TSA chief Kenneth Kaspurin said that TSA has ‘a toxic culture’ with ‘terrible’ morale.”

And the TSA wastes enormous amounts of money on things that don't work. Its SPOT program, which costs about \$200 million per year, is ineffective, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT) program trains personnel to “spot” terrorists by identifying “suspicious behaviors,” which pretty much just match how tired, stressed-out travelers behave.

“The solution is to dismantle TSA and move responsibility for screening operations to the nation’s airports,” says Edwards. “The government would continue to oversee aviation safety, but airports would be free to contract out screening to expert aviation security firms. Such a reform would end TSA’s conflict of interest stemming from both operating airport screening and overseeing it.”

There’s plenty of evidence that private screeners do a better job.

“Private airport screening is a successful approach used by other nations,” Edwards explains. “All major airports in Canada use private screening firms, as do about three quarters of Europe’s major airports. That practice creates a more efficient security structure, and allows governments to focus on aviation intelligence and oversight.”

Of course, the gold standard for transportation security is Israel and the El Al airline. As TheNew York Times points out, “No El Al plane has been attacked by terrorists in more than three decades, and no flight leaving Ben Gurion [Airport] has ever been hijacked.” Security is handled by the airline itself — a private company.

“Over a decade of experience has shown that the nationalization of airport screening under the Bush administration was a mistake,” Edwards says. “Let’s learn from reforms abroad, and bring in the private sector to boost the quality of our aviation security system.”