



TSA Watchdog Spills Secret Behind Long Airport Lines

Truth involves Obama, 'nude pictures of passengers' and fed-up workers

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Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson warns air travelers to prepare for much longer than usual airport security lines, but a Transportation Security Administration watchdog says this mess is simply a matter of the government failing to manage its resources responsibly.

On Monday, Johnson stood at Ronald Reagan National Airport just outside Washington and told passengers to expect longer than expected wait times as the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA, expedites hundreds of new personnel into service to speed up the security process. In Chicago, passengers were told to arrive three hours prior to departure.

The TSA claims congressional action has led to the elimination of some 4,500 personnel over the past few years and the agency simply doesn't have the manpower to keep up, but that's just spin according to Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute. He also runs Cato's Downsizing Government blog.

Edwards told WND and Radio America the TSA is littered with problems, starting with its existing personnel.

“Annual surveys of federal government employees find that the TSA and the broader Homeland Security Department have some of the poorest morale in the federal government,” Edwards said. “The TSA has a high turnover rate for their screeners, which is not good for morale and is not good for security.”

But perhaps even worse is TSA's penchant for directing its ever-increasing budget into the wrong areas.

“TSA has spent many billions of dollars on things that don't work,” Edwards said. “As a result, they've starved their budget from hiring more screeners to reduce congestion.”

He said the most glaring example is one of TSA's most controversial projects.

“Remember those full-body scanning machines that were in airports for years that essentially showed nude pictures of passengers as they got screened?” asked Edwards.

“Those things were eventually withdrawn because of civil liberties concerns. People didn’t want to see their nude bodies when they went to the airport. But those things have been found to not really work at all. It’s fairly easy to slip guns and plastic explosives through those machines.”

Another major problem, Edwards said, is the inability of such a large bureaucracy to adapt to differing needs at different airports.

“As a government bureaucracy, the TSA has a very inflexible workforce,” he said. “Unlike a private company, where if they saw one of their facilities or one of their cities get a lot more business and a lot more demand, they’d move workers over there. They’d hire more part-time workers to fill surges in demand. Government bureaucracies don’t do that. They have fixed numbers of people at these airports, and they don’t adjust them like any normal private business would.”

He said airports do have the option to boot the TSA and go with private security. He said only 15-20 airports do that and actually perform better when secret tests are conducted to see whether weapons or explosive materials get past security.

“Airports are allowed to opt out of TSA screening, and some of them have been looking at that recently because of the huge congestion at the airports,” Edwards said.

He said things work much more smoothly north of the border.

“In Canada, all major airports have private screening,” Edwards explained. “There’s a number of different expert companies that specialize in airport screening. They get three-year contracts to do particular airports. If they don’t do a good job, if they don’t have high security, they get fired. The next time around, a different company gets the contract.”

While U.S. airports do have the ability to ditch the TSA and hire private security, Edwards said the Obama administration is making it much tougher to do that.

“Congress has had to slap down the administration a few times to get it to allow airports to go private,” he said. “In the original legislation that created TSA, House Republicans slipped in this provision that airports could petition the Department of Transportation to go private, but the Obama administration has made that very difficult.”