



Tsa Slowdown Prompts Call For Airport Security Re-Privatization

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Long wait times and missed flights plaguing air travelers this summer are a result of a months-long fight for more taxpayer funding for a public-sector union representing government employees in the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). TSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It was created in 2001 to administer government policies to protect consumers using transportation services. Beginning in November 2015, the American Federation of Government Employees, a public-sector union, began organizing protests at major airports, such as Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, demanding the federal government hire more unionized employees at higher pay rates.

In late May, U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) responded to the slowdowns by calling on airports to consider expanding participation in the Screening Partnership Program (SPP), a TSA program allowing airports to contract with private security companies instead of employing TSA workers. Before TSA's creation, airport security screening was provided by private companies contracting with airline companies. The security companies were regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Currently, only 22 out of 537 airports with FAA certification participate in SPP.

Airport Security Theater

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies for the Cato Institute, says government administration of airport security hasn't made Americans safer.

Governmental operation of airport screening has not increased security, Edwards said. Indeed, comparisons of TSA screening to private screening, at the [22] or so U.S. airports that have private screening, have shown private screening is more efficient and is as good or better in terms of security performance than TSA screening.

More Workplace Flexibility

Edwards says private airport security companies can respond to changing conditions faster than TSA administrators, which benefits consumers.

Private screening firms under contract to airports would have more workforce flexibility and would be able to respond better to changes in demand and congestion problems, Edwards said. Centralized bureaucracies such as TSA are not flexible. Private businesses are nearly always more efficient than government monopolies such as TSA. Private screening at San Francisco International has been shown to be substantially more efficient than TSA screening at Los Angeles International.

Seeking Other Solutions

David Inserra, a homeland security policy advisor with The Heritage Foundation, says TSA doesn't have to be the only game in town.

In that post-9/11 environment, there was a strong impetus to have the government take the lead, Inserra said. While the federalization of airport security certainly boosted airport security from pre-9/11 levels, over the long term it has become clear that a fully federalized security scheme is not necessarily the most efficient or best way to provide security.

Partnering with the Private Sector

Inserra says TSA should get out of the screening business entirely.

TSA should ultimately be in the business of looking at risk in aviation security and looking for ways to best mitigate that risk together with the input of the private sector, which may have innovative or more efficient ways to handle such threats, Inserra said. Rather than focusing on being the front-end screeners, the TSA would focus on how to best advance security, while leaving the actual screening to companies that are better equipped to fulfill that mission.