

Voices from the RIGHT
on waste that's just wrong

"The \$3 Billion that supporters of this program are seeking for a favored contractor through the earmark process is money that the White House and the Pentagon under both Republican and Democratic Presidents feels does not need to be spent..."


David Keene,
The American
Conservative Union

THE DAILY CALLER

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The last line of defense

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From: John Pistole, Director, Transportation Security Administration

To: The Traveling Public

Subject: You Are the Ones You've Been Waiting For

As you read this, you may be among the hundreds of thousands gazing out the window of an airplane, safely en route to your Thanksgiving destination. Unfortunately, on the way to the plane, you were either run through a virtual strip search machine or felt up by TSA screeners — government employees that I called “the last line of defense” in hearings last week.

I've been informed by my staff that I misspoke. TSA screeners aren't the last line of defense. You are.

You, the traveling public, have been holding your own as a check on terrorists quite admirably from the very instant it became clear that the rules of the hijacking game had changed.

The passengers on Flight 93 immediately took action on September 11th, 2001, storming the cockpit and stopping the fourth terrorist attack at the cost of their own lives.

Two flight attendants and a defensive line of international travelers took down would-be shoe bomber Richard Reid.

A Dutch filmmaker tackled would-be Christmas Day bomber Farouk Abdulmutallab. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano was right when she said that “the system worked.” After all, the TSA itself counts passengers as part of “the system,” listing passengers among the twenty layers of aviation security.

Unfortunately, some of the other nineteen layers of security either aren't performing as well or don't justify the money we spend on them.

The body scanners, advertised as a means of finding liquid and powder explosives, aren't as effective as their manufacturers and the TSA would have you believe. The GAO issued a report in March questioning whether body scanners would have detected Abdulmutallab's suspicious package.

Whether they work is moot anyway; the terrorist organization that supported Abdulmutallab has already employed a suicide bomber with explosives hidden *inside* his body. The scanners are not designed to detect that. I've been brainstorming with my staff on how to address the body cavity threat. We anticipate an increase in latex glove acquisitions.

The GAO recommended a cost-benefit analysis before spending \$300 million on scanner machines and \$340 million more each year in additional staffing to run the equipment. Nevertheless, bureaucratic inertia ensured that the body scanner policy was already full speed ahead before any of that was achieved.

The need for more screeners to run the infernal machines comes at a time when the next Congress is considering a reduction in federal

payrolls across the government, including at the FBI. This decision prioritizes defensive airport hassle ahead of proactive counterterrorism.

The same GAO report identified cargo screening as a weak link in aviation security that needed attending to, but it took bombs in printer toner cartridges to get the TSA to shift some focus toward this threat.

While we're at it, we should note that federal air marshals are unlikely to stop a bomber on your flight. Marshals are present on fewer than ten percent of flights and have not been on targeted planes. The whole of the agency averages four arrests per year (at a cost of \$215 million per arrest) and has proven to be little deterrent on its own. Airlines have asked the federal air marshals service to stop placing its agents in first class. It costs too much to give them the best seats in the house, and hijacking is a threat we have addressed sufficiently: all cockpits now have reinforced doors, and a significant number of pilots has jumped through TSA hoops to keep a gun in the cockpit (my agency has never been a fan of this cost-effective program).

The terrorist threat has evolved to bombers of shoe and underwear fame, and they aren't trying to detonate them near the cockpit. And again, the passengers have been the real first responders, tackling bombers (and even drunk and belligerent travelers who cause other mischief) reliably since late 2001.

So, amid scanners and pat-downs and bans on nail clippers, *you* are really the aviation security force you've been counting on all along. No matter what the government does, some threats will always slip through when dealing with an adaptive, learning enemy.

So enjoy your flight, but don't get too complacent up there. Despite having our hands all over the problem, we at the TSA need you.

David Rittgers is an attorney and civil liberties analyst at the Cato Institute.

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