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## to get rich is glorious

"To get rich is glorious." -- Deng Xiaoping.  
This is perhaps the smartest thing ever  
uttered by a member of the Communist  
Party.

Friday, May 29, 2009

### The friendly skies

Air travel is both inspiring and aggravating. It both gives you the power to be transported across oceans in a matter of hours while also treating you like a farm animal as you are herded through security. While amazing, I think it could be so much more, and probably at lower cost.

I'm not alone in these suspicions, with Salon's "Ask the Pilot" columnist Patrick Smith offering up a **list of measures** to improve air travel that was written shortly after President Obama's election, which I will use as the basis for this post. Smith begins by deploring the state of air traffic control and airports:

*The country's antediluvian ATC system is grossly ineffecient (sic) and prone to expensive breakdowns. Although modern aircraft are equipped with advanced navigational equipment, the underlying network still requires pilots to navigate much the way they did a half-century ago, relying on antiquated, point-by-point routings that waste millions of gallons of fuel each year and add to delays. The groundwork for improvement is already in place. The so-called NexGen (Next Generation) initiative will move ATC toward a streamlined, satellite-based system incrementally over the next several years.*

*But if the current predictions of air traffic growth are anywhere near accurate, we need to move faster. Meanwhile, runways and taxiways are in increasingly poor condition, and many airports lack ground surveillance radar, stopway barriers and other safety equipment. (Despite our excellent track record, the sharp increase in air traffic has pushed many airports to the brink of saturation, increasing the chances of runway collisions and other hazards.)*

While Smith nails the problems, he probably reveals Salon's left-wing bias when examining solutions, unimaginatively calling for higher fees to fund needed modernization. The better move would be to privatize air traffic control, which has already been successfully done in Canada **notes Chris Edwards** of the Cato Institute (and a Canada native I believe):

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