



## TSA Gets Up Close and Personal

Trust Jay Leno, America's humorist, to get a laugh out of it. The Tonight Show audience howled when he said, "It was bad enough when the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents would go through your underwear in your luggage. Now they're going through your underwear while you're wearing it."

A friend of mine also tried to make light of the situation. After a recent trip he remarked, "I was patted down so vigorously, I didn't know whether to leave a tip or lodge a complaint." But in truth, there's nothing funny about the new and aggressive screening that many travelers have encountered at the airport this holiday season.



It all began when those wonderful folks at the TSA purchased the latest in full-body scanners. The machines — which require you to not only take off your shoes, but also remove your belt, empty your pockets and stand with an arms-over-the-head, "I surrender" posture — are so sophisticated that they can (and do) take photographs of what you would look like if you were standing there virtually naked.

This has led to some inappropriate comments on the part of security personnel. One male TSA screener was overheard saying to another, "Did you see the garbanzos on that lady?" His buddy replied, "No, but I'll catch them on the rerun."

While the TSA assures us that the powerful X-rays used in the new screeners are harmless, many medical authorities disagree. At least one expert says the radiation is 20 times more powerful than what the TSA claims. Apparently the radiation to your neck and face is strong enough to increase the danger of skin cancer. As a result, the pilots association advised its members to refuse to go through the machines.

So it comes as no surprise that there has been a huge outcry raised against the machines and the people who operate them. This led to the TSA to offer an alternative: If you refuse to go through a scanner, you will be subjected to a *very* aggressive, full-body pat-down. And by "aggressive," I mean that your genitalia (and, if you're a female, your breasts) will be touched. While trying to defend the agency, Senator Claire McCaskill had the audacity to refer to the TSA procedures as "love pats." Hope that costs her some votes next election.

Let me interject what is definitely not a rhetorical question here for your consideration: What sort of person would *want* the job of being a TSA security watchdog? I don't know what psychological screening they undergo — if you do, I wish you'd tell us. But just imagine the sort of person who would respond to the following advertisement:

**HELP WANTED:** Must be willing to subject adults and children to all sorts of humiliating orders,



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including full-body pat-downs and invasive photography. If anyone resists, you must tell them, “You must comply or you won’t fly.” Whatever happens, you will have the law — and numerous fellow employees — to back you up.

I can’t imagine anything that would be a more overt appeal to perverts and petty tyrants. Can you? In fact, given the enormous possibility of abuse, I’m shocked we haven’t heard more complaints about over-zealous officials abusing their authority.

It’s no surprise that many Americans are resisting and protesting. One of the latest is a young man named John Tyner, who secretly recorded his encounter with security personnel at San Diego’s Lindbergh Field. When he discovered that the new, invasive, full-body scanners had been installed at the airport (despite the TSA’s Website saying they weren’t in use there), he refused to submit to the machine.

He was then told that a TSA agent would have to conduct a kind of “groin check.” His reply has delighted more than a million people who watched the encounter on the clip he posted afterwards on YouTube: “If you touch my junk, I’m going to have you arrested.”

Of course, in this day and age, it is far more likely that Tyner would be the one who was arrested. When he said that he’d refuse to fly and would go back home rather than submit to the new procedures, he was told that he would be “subject to a civil suit and a \$10,000 fine” if he left the secured area.

Why is all of this necessary? Actually, as commentator Charles Krauthammer has pointed out, it’s not. “This has nothing to do with safety,” he declared. “95% of these inspections, searches, shoe removals, and pat-downs are ridiculously unnecessary. The only reason we continue to do this is that people are too cowed to even question the absurd taboo against profiling.”

Amen.

In the face of rapidly growing opposition to its measures, the TSA launched a massive public relations campaign of its own. Suddenly, TSA Administrator John Pistole was everywhere — the morning TV shows, the afternoon gabfests, a long editorial in *USA Today*, an even longer interview in the *Wall Street Journal*. In every case, the defense was the same: We’re doing this for your safety.

I was reminded of Benjamin Franklin’s famous observation: “Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

If the object is to prevent a suicide bomber from getting aboard a plane, here’s an idea for the TSA: For a fraction of the cost of one of those full-body scanners, how about hiring the local bomb squad to build one of those solid-steel containers they use to detonate suspected explosives? Make it large enough to hold a full-sized adult.

If you have even the remotest suspicion of someone in line, tell them they have to pass through the new security facility. Assure them that “It won’t take nude photographs of you. But it will detonate any explosives that are hidden on your person. Okay, sir or madam, please step this way.”

While we wait for such a common-sense approach to be adopted, here’s another idea to consider. Ron Paul, my favorite maverick representative, introduced legislation in the House of Representatives last month to affirm that “security screeners are not immune from any U.S. law regarding physical contact with another person, making images of another person, or causing physical harm through the use of radiation-emitting machinery on another person. It means they are subject to the same laws as the rest of us.”



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Now there's an interesting idea: Make our would-be masters subject to the same laws as you and I are.

Hmm. Next thing you know, someone will suggest that politicians be subject to the same security procedures we are. And maybe even the same retirement benefits.

Nah, we'll never get that tough with them.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

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