



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 28, 2011

Texas Profits From Items Confiscated by TSA

The [Austin American-Statesman](#) reports that a state surplus store in the capital has “one small room” nearly filled with “items that were left behind or confiscated — ‘We say willfully surrendered,’ said cashier Roberta Siller — at airport security checkpoints.” Those items were “willfully surrendered” in the same way one willfully surrenders his wallet to an armed robber blocking his exit. Travelers had no choice but to hand them over to the TSA’s armed agents if they wanted to fly.



Among the most common confiscated items are snow globes, of which there are “rows and rows” at the store, according to the paper. Those seemingly harmless dust-gatherers, available in every tourist trap’s gift shop, are now verboten on airplanes because they contain that deadly liquid, water.

Even more common than snow globes are knives and other sharp objects: one-inch pocket knives, hunting knives, screwdrivers, scissors, pizza cutters, corkscrews with attached knives, and nail clippers with attached files. Yes, the life-threatening inch-long files attached to nail clippers are too fearful to be allowed on planes in the post-9/11 world.

Anything that resembles a weapon ends up in the store, too, including toy guns and belt buckles shaped like guns and grenades.

If a private citizen tried to sell merchandise he had stolen from his neighbors, the state would throw the book at him and, quite possibly, at his customers. Yet not only does the Texas State Surplus Store admit to turning quite a profit by fencing stolen merchandise; but its customers also have no qualms about buying the hot items and then being identified in the local newspaper, as happened with Austin craftsman Eric Billig, who told the *American-Statesman* that he patronizes the store to get “cheap tools.”

The newspaper notes that the store does sell actual state surplus such as “desks, chairs, file cabinets and other items state agencies want to get rid of,” including former state trooper cars. Of course, these items were purchased with Texans’ taxes — money “willfully surrendered” under threat of imprisonment — making their resale only slightly more acceptable than the resale of blatantly confiscated items. Texans may, however, be somewhat consoled with the knowledge that the profits — \$6.9 million worth in 2010 — go back to the state’s coffers, which presumably helps keep taxes lower than they would be if the state merely junked the stuff it no longer wants.

“In its own small way,” writes the paper, “the stuff travelers leave behind” — whether by accident or under duress — “is helping ease the state’s financial woes.”



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“Only time will tell,” comments *Reason*’s [Lucy Steigerwald](#), “how many rogue pocket knives it takes to slash Texas’ \$15-25 billion deficit.”



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