Written by **Jack Kenny** on November 27, 2012

TSA Makes Travel More Dangerous

The average American is more likely to die in his bathtub than be killed by an Islamic terrorist. That is but one of many fascinating statistics presented by Charles Kenny (no relations to this writer) in his article on Businessweek.com, "Airport Security Is Making Americans Less Safe." And if that little datum makes you feel a little less secure about your next bath or shower, consider the bright side. At least there are no Transportation Security Administration agents between you and your bathtub.

The TSA, an agency that ranks in popularity somewhere between the Internal Revenue Service and your state Department of Motor Vehicles, gets no mercy from Kenny, who chronicles its foibles and absurdities in embarrassing detail. Yes, TSA officials did confiscate 1,200 firearms last year, Kenny concedes. And it did discover one batch of C4 explosives, though only on the return flight. But the agency's list of "Top Good Catches of 2011" does not mention its capture of the GI Joe actions doll's 4-inch plastic rifle or all the "face cream, breast milk and live fish that vigilant screeners collected in airport security lines last year," notes Kenny, adding that in all of last year, "the TSA didn't spot a single terrorist trying to board an airline in the U.S."

Chances are you haven't spotted any terrorists around your bathtub either, which would enable TSA officials, were they in charge of bathtub security, to say, "See what a good job we're doing!"

No one denies the need for security at airports. But the Transportation Security Agency, created by Congress after the terrorist skyjackings of 9/11, has grown into an $8 billion a year monster, whose 50,000 employees have given passengers at nearly every American airport reason to recall anew Thomas Jefferson's complaint, enshrined in Declaration of Independence, that a distant authority has "sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance." The harassment has been well documented in reports of excessively groping "pat downs" in search of contraband or the indignity of being required to stand spread-eagled, hands on head, while an agent armed with a body scanner electronically undresses a passenger to discover what might be hidden under a traveler's clothing.

"Everything's changed since 9/11" is a common explanation, but is it all necessary? In Israel, where there has been no small amount of experience with terrorist attacks, there is intense scrutiny of a relatively small number of suspects. But passengers are not, as a matter of routine, frisked or subjected to search by body scanner. As an Israeli security consultant explained to the *Washington Post* in 2010, "Taking the bottle of water from the 87-year-old woman at JFK, you will never find an explosive material that is coming from bin Laden." Kenny reports that Canada allows passengers not flying to the United States to keep their shoes on and their iPads in their bags. "The U.K. will allow you to carry small decorative snow globes onto a flight, deeming tolerable the risk of onboard snowpocalypse," he notes. Those intrusive body scanners have been banned in the European Union.

The TSA, is of course, but one component of the monumental effort since 9/11 to make America and

much of the rest of the world safe from terrorism. There is no way to put a monetary value on human life, of course, but the numbers would suggest that a cost-benefit analysis would not be encouraging to all this effort at terrorism prevention. The *Business Week* article cites a study by John Mueller of Ohio State and Mark Stewart of the University of Newcastle showing that, counting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, increased homeland security and counterterrorism spending since 9/11 has totaled more than $3.1 trillion. It would take a whole lot of terrorist attacks to do that much damage to the American economy.

The TSA procedures are costly, overly intrusive, and highly inconvenient to the millions of passengers subjected to them. But how have they managed to make us *less* safe? Well, by persuading a great many of us to avoid the inconvenience and indignities at the airports by doing our holiday and other traveling in the most dangerous places in the world — the American highways.

"To make flying as dangerous as using a car," Kenny wrote, "a four-plane disaster on the scale of 9/11 would have to occur every month, according to analysis published in the *American Scientist*. Researchers at Cornell University estimate that people switching from air to road transportation in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks led to an increase of 242 driving fatalities per month — which means that a lot more people died on the roads as an indirect result of 9/11 than died from being on the planes that terrible day."

Ronald Reagan said, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" Perhaps we should worry all the more when "helpful" agents of the federal government are here to make us safer.

Photo: AP Images

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful
perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a
world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture,
and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.

What's Included?

24 Issues Per Year
Optional Print Edition
Digital Edition Access
Exclusive Subscriber Content
Audio provided for all articles
Unlimited access to past issues
Coming Soon! Ad FREE
60-Day money back guarantee!
Cancel anytime.

Subscribe