



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 19, 2010

Airports Consider Ousting TSA Screeners

In the year's following the 9/11 attacks, airports' "security systems" have been openly criticized for a number of reasons, ranging from their inconvenience to their failure to actually secure passengers. The addition of the intrusive naked body scanners and invasive patdown procedures to airport "security" has evoked even more anger from passengers who are now beginning to revolt in the form of lawsuits and even physical altercations.



The public outcry against the measures taken by the U.S. Transportation Security Administration has one congressman calling for TSAs elimination.

According to [AntiWar.com](#), Incoming House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee chairman John Mica of (R-FL) has sent letters to many of the largest airports urging them to ditch the TSA entirely, and many are said to be quite keen on the idea.

Outrage over the patdowns and body scanners prompted several senators to request that TSA relax its rules, but the requests were rejected by TSA chief John Pistole.

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Confronted by TSA's unwillingness to make any changes to its procedures, Mica took matters into his own hands.

Aware that airports are permitted under federal law to choose screeners from the private sector instead of those from the government, Congressman Mica is leading the push for airports to do just that. The congressman reportedly sent letters to 100 of the nations busiest airports urging them to request private security guards.

The [Associated Press](#) writes that for Mica, The way to make travelers feel more comfortable would be to kick TSA employees out of their posts at the ends of the snaking security lines.

According to the AP, however, with private screeners at the helm, little may change in the area of intrusiveness. Private contractors are not a cure-all for passengers aggrieved about taking off their shoes for security checks, passing through full-body scanners or getting hand-frisked. For example, contractors must follow all TSA-mandated security procedures, including hand pat-downs when necessary.

Addressing the bloated bureaucracy of the TSA, Mica asserts, I think we could use half the personnel and streamline the system.

In addition to Micas desires to cut bureaucracy and provide passengers with more dignity, he likely feels obligated to the private airport contractors who donated to his campaign, including Lockheed Martin Corporation's Employees Political Action Committee, Raytheon Companys Political Action



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Committee, and Firstline Transportation Security Inc.s Political Action Committee, from whom he received \$81,000.

However, Micas spokesman Justin Harclerode asserts that the contributions did not have improper influence over the congressman, and that the private contractors never contacted him about providing screening.

Several airports appear to be considering Micas request, including Orlando Sanford International Airport. There, the top executive says he will begin switching to private screeners as early as January, assuming that the private screeners would be able to handle the millions of passengers the airport sees every year and barring unforeseen circumstances.

Larry Dale, CEO of the Orlando Sanford International Airport, explains that he was impressed when he encountered private screeners at airports in Rochester, New York and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, particularly with their customer service, an issue Dale takes with the TSA.

He remarked, [TSA screeners] are a little testy. And we work hard to get passengers [on] airlines. And to have it undone by a personality problem?

Noting that private contractors would likely be more responsive to local concerns, Dale is sold on the idea. Competition drives accountability, it drives efficiency, it drives a particular approach to your airport, he explains. That company is just going to be looking at you. Theyre not going to be driven out of Washington, they will be driven out of here.

Additionally, a smaller airport in Macon City, Georgia plans to hire private screeners as well. Macon City Councilor Erick Erickson calls the transition from TSA to private screeners a protest. I am a frequent air traveler and I have experienced ... TSA agents who have let the power go to their head. You can complain about these people, but very rarely does the bureaucracy work quickly enough to remove those people from their positions.

Several airlines have made use of private screeners virtually since the inception of the TSA, most notably San Francisco International Airport. The AP reports that this airport believed a private contractor would have more flexibility to supplement staff during busy periods with part-time employees. Also, the citys high cost of living had made it difficult in the past to recruit federal employees to run immigration and customs stations a problem the airport didnt want at security checkpoints.

Greg Soule, TSA spokesman, did not wish to directly address Micas letter, but confirmed that the airports do maintain the right to opt for private screeners.

Whether the 100 airports addressed by Mica will make the change to private security remains to be seen. If many do, however, the transition from TSA screeners to private screeners at major airports will likely be the best argument for capitalism that free-market loving congressmen could have ever hoped for.

Photo: AP Images

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