

The press reports are horrifying: 95 year-old women humiliated; children molested; disabled people abused; men and women subjected to unwarranted groping and touching of their most private areas; involuntary radiation exposure. If the perpetrators were a gang of criminals, their headquarters would be raided by SWAT teams and armed federal agents. Unfortunately, in this case the perpetrators are armed federal agents. This is the sorry situation ten years after the creation of the Transportation Security Administration.

The requirement that Americans be forced to undergo this appalling treatment simply for the "privilege" of traveling in their own country reveals much about how the federal government feels about our liberties. The unfortunate fact that we put up with this does not speak well for our willingness to stand up to an abusive government.

Many Americans continue to fool themselves into accepting TSA abuse by saying "I don't mind giving up my freedoms for security." In fact, they are giving up their liberties and not receiving security in return. Last week, for example, just days after an elderly cancer victim was forced to submit to a cruel and pointless TSA search, including removal of an adult diaper, a Nigerian immigrant somehow managed stroll through TSA security checks and board a flight from New York to LA -- with a stolen, expired boarding pass and an out-of-date student ID as his sole identification! He was detained and questioned, only to be released to do it again 5 days later! We should not be surprised to find government ineptitude and indifference at the TSA.

At the time the TSA was being created I strongly opposed federalization of airline security. As I wrote in an article back in 2001:

"Congress should be privatizing rather than nationalizing airport security. The free market can and does produce excellent security in many industries. Many security-intensive industries do an outstanding job of maintaining safety without depending on federal agencies. Nuclear power plants, chemical plants, oil refineries, and armored money transport companies all employ private security forces that operate very effectively. No government agency will ever care about the bottom-line security and profitability of the airlines more than the airlines themselves. Airlines cannot make money if travelers and flight crews are afraid to fly, and in a free market they would drastically change security measures to prevent future tragedies. In the current regulatory environment, however, the airlines prefer to relinquish all responsibility for security to the government, so that they cannot be held accountable for lapses in the future."

What we need is real privatization of security, but not phony privatization with the same TSA screeners in private security firm uniforms still operating under the "guidance" of the federal government. Real security will be achieved when the airlines are once again in charge of protecting their property and their passengers.

In the meantime, this week I am introducing the American Traveler Dignity Act, which establishes that airport security screeners are not immune from any US 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 not above laws the rest of us must obey. As we continue to see more and more outrageous stories of TSA abuses and failures, I hope that my colleagues in the House will listen to their constituents and join with me to support this legislation.