

## TSA: Taking, Splurging, and Appropriating

Written by Garry Reed

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In what must be one of the few fun-filled functions in the otherwise beastly boring lives of bureaucrats, undercover operatives try to sneak weaponry through airport checkpoints to test how good Transportation Security Administration screeners are at finding guns, bombs, and knives.

At half a dozen airports around the country, TSA employees were so uncharacteristically successful that it naturally triggered an investigation to see if they were cheating on their tests.

Sure enough, the wand-wavers had been tipped off by their buddies that the fun-filled functionaries were coming.

People were shocked. Who knew that the TSA was supposed to find guns, bombs, and knives? Everyone thought the TSA was supposed to take away fingernail files, toothpicks, and life-threatening dentures. TSA is supposed to lavishly bandy billions of taxbucks about like every other beltway bureaucracy. TSA is supposed to steal stuff from the peripatetic public.

When, in fact, does TSA even find the time to look for guns, bombs, and knives?

When the infant agency first started hiring employees, top brass set up their recruiting offices

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in lavish hotels with golf courses, pools, and spas, such as the Wyndham Peaks Resort in Telluride, Colorado. Then, at a cost of 435 million taxbucks, they created 150 "temporary assessment centers" across the country to vet their new hires. The final cost to the poor dumb slob sucker taxpayer was \$39,727 per hireling.

Following its second year of existence, the TSA threw itself a massive "we love ourselves" half-million-dollar awards ceremony/banquet at the Grand Hyatt in D.C. Senior executives awarded themselves bonuses averaging \$16,000 apiece and passed out \$81,000 worth of plaques to pet employees. One received a "lifetime achievement award" for two whole years of service.

(At this point, libertarians would like to remind you that whenever politicians of the Democrat and Republican organized crime syndicates insist that they just absolutely must raise your taxes or the sky will fall, they actually need to tap your bottomless pockets so they can continue to support themselves and their bureaubuddies in the power-impudent and loot-lavish lifestyles to which they've become accustomed.)

Meanwhile, many of those \$39,727 hirelings who graduated from one of those 435 million dollars' worth of "temporary assessment centers" have gone on to join their senior executives in their criminal careers.

Jewelry valued at \$8,500 disappeared from one woman's checked luggage. A man's \$1,300 flat-screen video monitor was boosted from its carrying case. Another passenger caught a checkpoint screener sneaking bucks from his billfold. Custom-made jewelry checked by rapper Lil' Kim disappeared. Digital cameras, portable DVD players, iPods, and silver-plated cufflinks go missing.

According to ABC News, 400 of the first 2,000 screeners hired at New York's three major airports already had criminal records. So that's what taxpayers got for their \$39,727 hirelings.

By November 2004, the TSA had already paid out \$1.5 million in damages to 15,000 passengers who filed theft claims against screeners.

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Screeners screw travelers and taxpayers cover the cost.

Little has changed since.

And then there's this cheery thought: If people at airports can take stuff out of bags, they can just as easily stuff stuff into bags. Like guns, bombs, and knives.

Americans put up with this why? In order to experience the utterly false feelings of security.

Will the TSA be with us forever? Bet on it. A bureaucracy, like a tax, hangs on like a bad case of the clap long after its original reason for existing has vanished. The Spanish-American War lasted four months in 1898 while the "temporary telephone tax" levied to help fund it lasted for 108 years.

Decades after the last terrorist has gone off to meet his 72 virgins in paradise, the TSA will still be poking, prodding, and pushing your great-grandchildren through airports under some yet unimagined self-justification for perpetuating itself.

Long live TSA.

*More of Garry Reed's writing can be found at (<http://www.freecannon.com>).*