

Passengers With Pull

by **Becky Akers**

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You knew it would come to this.

A "staff memo" to the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) new director recommends that politicians and others of Leviathan's acolytes be exempted from screening at airports. Meanwhile, UPI reports that we "ordinary passengers" will continue to be wanded, questioned, groped, ordered about and insulted.

Hard to believe, in a democracy as dedicated to fairness and equality as ours, that the TSA sees two classes of citizens out there. The first consists of those who work for government and who are therefore credible, honest, responsible, and safe. These folks would never launch a fiery raid, complete with CS gas and tanks, on 90 religious Americans. Thus, we can trust them not to blow up a plane. They wouldn't shoot a 14-year-old boy in the back while killing his dog and his mother, either; obviously, they pose no threat to their fellow passengers. They do not lie about weapons of mass destruction, nor do they authorize unconstitutional wars that slaughter thousands while enriching Leviathan's friends. American aviation should welcome these saints as valued customers.

Then there are the rest of us. We can't be trusted to do much of anything any more, whether it's something as complex as educating our children or as simple as boarding a jet without detonating a bomb. Even our babies are suspect. Those unfortunate enough to share a name with someone on the government's "No-Fly List" are prohibited from flights. Such a coincidence is easier than you might suppose because about 100,000 people have landed on that list. That's right: there

are 100,000 "possible terrorists" wandering the country, Americans so dangerous they're barred from airliners.

Ingrid Sanden had hoped to fly home to Washington with one such desperado, her year-old daughter. Presumably, the child had refrained from terrorist activities on the flight from Washington, but her spotless record did not fool the TSA. It intercepted this dangerous duo before they boarded their return flight. The agency allowed neither common sense nor appearances to sway it, as Ingrid sniveled to a reporter for the AP: "It was bizarre. I was hugely pregnant, and I was like, 'We look really threatening.'"

With such terrorists as Ingrid's infant on the loose, the TSA shouldn't waste time screening politicians. That's why, according to last Friday's *Washington Post*, the TSA has proposed allowing not only airline pilots but "members of Congress,...Cabinet members, state governors, federal judges, high-ranking military officers, and people with top-secret security clearances" to skip the long lines and humiliation of the checkpoints.

The TSA is an agency in crisis, and its directors come and go with the frequency of rats from the proverbial sinking ship. Edmund Hawley, recipient of the "staff memo," is the fourth American in as many years to head the TSA. In exchange for treating his fellow citizens as potential terrorists, he enjoys a lavish office – the TSA decorated its headquarters with \$500,000-worth of artwork and silk plants – and parties at which the cheese alone costs \$500. We terrorists pay for all this, of course.

It's important to keep the money flowing at an agency with such sumptuous tastes, and the TSA knows who's buttering its bread – or, in this case, cutting its cheese. Congressmen are unlikely to continue voting the agency funds when its screeners harass them rather than pregnant women. Indeed, both Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass) and Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) caterwauled when the TSA presumed them as great a threat to American aviation as us serfs. Kennedy was "questioned" and "kept waiting" at an airport five times in one month "because his name appeared on the government's secret 'no-fly' list," as the *Washington Post* reported on August 20, 2004. Meanwhile, CNN quoted Lewis' aide on his

travails: "In one incident, security officials took 'every single item' out of his luggage.... Another time, after he was allowed to board, security officials questioned him at his seat."

Pretty mild compared to what "ordinary passengers" suffer at the TSA's hands. Yet Kennedy and Lewis objected to this abuse as much as we do. The difference is that while we helplessly endure and fume, they aired their complaints at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last year. Then they cut the TSA's budget. That grabbed the agency's attention, resulting in the "staff memo" to Hawley with its proposed changes to the bureaucracy's procedures.

Naturally, the TSA is cloaking its motivation for these changes. It wants us to believe that our comfort and convenience, not politicians', inspired the memo and the brainstorming – I use the term loosely – behind it. Mark Hatfield, Jr, the TSA's spokesman, delivered this masterpiece of jargon and spin: "The process is designed to stimulate creative thinking and challenge conventional beliefs. In the end, it will allow us to work smarter and better as we secure America's transportation system." Clever use of the comparative, isn't it? As though the agency currently works either smart or well.

The TSA thinks we're dumb enough to swallow this baloney, that we'll believe it regrets its reputation as aviation's Gestapo. And the press is dutifully parroting that line. The changes, AP reports, are "designed to reduce checkpoint hassles for the nation's 2 million [daily] passengers." It's true that the agency is relaxing a few rules. It may allow us to pack scissors and razor blades in carry-on bags. It may even extend that largesse to knives less than 5 inches long. It's also muttering that we can retain rather than remove our shoes at checkpoints. And passengers wearing "tight clothing" may not "need" to be patted-down. But shoes will be shed and pat-downs commence if screeners deem us "suspicious." Because, lo and behold, these cretins still wield the power to pick on whomever they please. Their tyrannical discretion over us remains as strong as ever, though the TSA hopes we'll think otherwise.

Actually, the only significant change the "staff memo"

advises is rescuing from the TSA's clutches the politicians who control its budget. And that should surprise no one.

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Becky Akers [[send her mail](#)] writes primarily about the American Revolution.

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