

## The TSA – The Guards of the Prison We Live In

### Description

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**The TSA has been promising to end its boneheaded ways for more than 20 years. Flying out of Dallas International Airport last week, I ruefully recognized that all TSA reform promises are malarkey.**

As I neared the end of a TSA checkpoint line, I saw two women loitering behind a roped off section for CLEAR, a new biometric surveillance program that works with 35 airports and coordinates with TSA. CLEAR involves travelers standing in photo kiosks that compare their faces with a federal database of photos from passport applications, driver's licenses, and other sources. The Washington Post warned that airport facial recognition systems are "America's biggest step yet to normalize treating our faces as data that can be stored, tracked and, inevitably, stolen."

Though the CLEAR program is purportedly voluntary, TSA agents at Washington National Airport recently threatened long delays for any passenger who refused to be photographed by CLEAR, including U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR). Merkley said that TSA falsely claimed there were signs notifying people that the facial scans are optional. But the clock is ticking down on seeking voluntary cooperation. TSA chief David Pekoske announced in March that "eventually... we will [require biometrics](#) across the board."

"Idle hands are the tool of the devil," as the old saying goes, and the same is true of cell phones. **I raised my phone camera, snapped a few shots of the women, and the howling commenced.**

***"What are you doing?"*** screamed a young woman wearing a CLEAR jacket.

***"You can't take my photo!"***

***"But you're scanning people's eyeballs,"*** I replied. What could be more intrusive?

***"That doesn't matter because you can't take our photo – it's not allowed!"***

She sounded as if I had desecrated a federal temple.

**I gave her a Chesire cat smile. With her three-inch artificial fingernails, I wondered if she planned to audition for a Dracula movie. Her colleague speedily exited, perhaps to summon police to end my assault. But if airport officials had sought to seize those photos, they would have faced a legal ruckus.**

The queue finally reached the stern middle-aged TSA dude sitting behind plexiglass who checked identification and boarding passes. He stared at my driver's license and then gave me an intense look. TSA considers a "cold, penetrating stare" a terrorist warning sign, but I assumed this guy was above

suspicion. I was tempted to ask how many TSA Watch Lists included my name thanks to TSA bashes I wrote for New York Times, USA Today, New York Post, Washington Times, and other publications. Was this TSA dude reading about how the TSA chief denounced me in 2014 for “maligning” TSA agents?

**TSA protocols make flying vexing without making travelers safe.** As I approached the luggage scanner, I removed my wallet and stuffed it in the bottom of my carry-on bag. More than 500 TSA agents have been fired for robbing passengers. In July, three TSA agents at Miami International Airport were arrested because they pilfered property “while the passengers were distracted with their own screenings and not paying attention to their items,” the [New York Post reported](#). A TSA agent admitted to partnering with another TSA employee to steal a thousand dollars a day, including grabbing cash from wallets sent through TSA x-ray systems.

**TSA decrees are wildly inconsistent, but every command is presumed sacrosanct.** Flying out of Washington Dulles Airport the prior week, I was told to keep my laptop in my courier bag. Fine by me. In Dallas, a TSA drill sergeant wannabe barked orders for everyone to remove their laptops and lay them out before sending through the x-ray machines. TSA agents have been caught selling stolen laptops on eBay, so I tried to keep an eye on my computer.

TSA lunacy also obliged me to modify my attire. Instead of good ol’ blue jeans, I was , wearing Dockers. Prior to entering TSA’s Whole Body Scanner at Washington National Airport for a recent flight, I did everything right – emptied my pockets, removed my belt and boots, and sported a friendly smile (ok, not that friendly). But as I exited the scanner, a TSA supervisor grimly announced, ***“We have to do a supplemental patdown.”***

***“What the heck are you talking about?”*** I groused.

He pointed to the large screen next to the scanner that showed the problem: an illuminated thin line directly in front of my groin.

***“That’s the zipper on my pants,”*** I exclaimed.

***“Sir, we have to do a supplemental patdown. If you want it conducted in a private room, we can do that,”***came the rote TSA reply.

***“Hell no. Let’s do it where the TSA surveillance cameras record the search.”***

Never, ever go into a private room with TSA agents.

A tall, heavysset TSA agent with his hair tied in a bun atop his head came up and began vigorously grappling my ankles. Did TSA agents have a daily quote for groping or what? **As I left the checkpoint, I muttered about TSA standing for “Too Stupid for Arby’s.”**

Dockers were slightly less likely to trigger this boneheaded alert than blue jeans. But it wasn’t my fault that TSA screeners failed to detect 95 percent of the test bombs and weapons during covert tests by federal inspectors.

I had no trouble in the Whole-Body Scanner in Dallas last week, but **my carry-on bag failed the TSA inspection.**

A beefy young female agent hoisted my bag and carted it to the end of the checkpoint area. She was the final participant in the gauntlet of village idiocy that I had to pass before reaching my plane. She summoned me to explain its contents and my depravity. "Is there anything sharp in this bag?"

"No," I replied. Geez, how much did TSA pay for x-ray gizmos that were more obtuse than a presidential speechwriter?

She unzipped my bag and began pawing through it. In lieu of a machete, **she found a small half-full jar of peanut butter.**

"You can't take liquids on a flight," she announced solemnly.

***"It's peanut butter. It's not liquid."***

***"It's liquid and it's prohibited,"*** was her decree. *Did TSA covertly classify peanut butter as a bioweapon, or what?*

*"Ya, whatever," I said as I abandoned the jar to federal custody.*

**Chatting with another jaded traveler as I put my boots back after clearing the checkpoint, he asked if I was upset about losing my peanut butter.**

I smiled: "I'll settle accounts with TSA later."