



Written by [Becky Akers](#) on November 4, 2009

## \$22.7 Million to Spy on Mothers and Congressmen (Not That the Latter Don't Need Watching)

You probably haven't noticed the terrorists thronging airports in San Francisco, Dallas, Rhode Island, and Philadelphia, but the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) certainly has. (That's the bureaucracy groping passengers at checkpoints, ransacking their bags, and generally traumatizing them as badly as an IRS audit.) Ergo, the TSA will squander another \$22.7 million of our taxes on its closed-circuit television-systems (CCTV) at Dallas Love Field, Dallas/Fort Worth, San Francisco International, TF Green Airport in Warwick, and Philadelphia International.

CCTV "reinforces TSA's layers of security by helping us resolve security threats and prevent hostile activity in the aviation environment," or so claims one of the TSA's many and duplicative leeches, "Federal Security Director" [Mike Restovich](#). Mike's not exactly a sterling reference: scandal after scandal has plagued his stint at the public trough, including a conflict of interest when he managed a "[private security consulting company](#)" on the side with another of the TSA's honchos.



But we needn't take Mike's questionable word on CCTV's indispensability for spying on us. Also testifying to its benefits is another of the "Federal Security Directors" (I told you they're many and duplicative), [Joseph Salter](#): "This enhancement will improve security and assist with the resolution of suspicious items.... The addition of new cameras will be an invaluable asset to our security efforts at T.F. Green Airport."

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Alas, Joe's as untrustworthy as Mike: [He tried to sneak ammunition through his own airport's checkpoints](#). Joe claims he had forgotten about the six .38-caliber bullets weighing down his pocket — a lapse that would land any of us civilians in jail but which he and his buddies on the police force laughed off.

Fortunately for Mike and Joe, malfeasance seldom damages a bureaucrat's credibility with the mainstream media — though, to be fair, most reporters probably aren't aware of either wretch's record since they prefer recycling Leviathan's press releases to researching stories on their own.



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Indeed, their ignorance of the pair's unsavory history probably matches their ignorance of the TSA's unsavory history with CCTV. Thus far, the agency has used its photographic equipment to foil American citizens, not terrorists. [In 2007, CCTVs at Reagan National Airport in Washington DC captured a mother's confrontation](#) with screeners over a ... sippy cup! Yes. Not a bomb, not a WMD, but a toddler's canteen. The passenger dumped its contents on the floor — accidentally, she claimed; deliberately, the TSA shrieked. The agency offered [footage from its vaunted cameras](#) to settle this national-security dispute.

[CCTV almost rode to the rescue](#) again in Salt Lake City. In September, screeners there tried to photograph a U.S. Congressman naked with another of the TSA's cameras, a millimeter-wave scanner. These pornographic contraptions peer through clothing, allowing screeners to see not only the bombs we all bind to our bodies but our bodies, too. That spurred Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R- UT) to introduce legislation in Congress restricting this voyeurism. [He calls millimeter-wave scanning](#) "as complete an invasion of privacy as there is. For the federal government to view passengers naked or to pressure or mislead them into believing they must enter an imaging machine before boarding a flight is flat out wrong.... We can secure airplanes without totally surrendering our civil liberties. I suppose that's why the legislation I introduced passed the House on a bipartisan basis with 318 votes in favor of my legislation."

Psst, Jason and all who voted "Yea": How about introducing legislation that flat-out abolishes the TSA? In fact, you needn't even exert yourselves that much: simply refuse to pass [the funding bill that re-authorizes the TSA each year](#).

Jason has also voted against compelling the TSA's goons to join a labor union. He says the TSA took revenge for these jabs: When he showed up at Salt Lake International Airport, screeners harassed him, ordered him through the strip-search machine and laughed at him; the TSA huffs that its agents were their usual courteous, sympathetic selves. Can the TSA's surveillance footage resolve this threat to American aviation?

"Hey, let's roll the tape," [Jason says](#). Which, predictably, turned out to be [edited and incomplete when the TSA finally released it](#).

The TSA's cameras fulfill another function as well. Undercover federal agents frequently administer the bureaucratic equivalent of a pop-quiz: They try to smuggle fake weapons onto flights. Screeners aren't supposed to know the agents' identities or looks, what contraband they're carrying or where they've hidden it; indeed, screeners aren't even supposed to know they're being tested. But our buddy Mike, he of the conflicting interests, was alerting "Federal Security Directors" nationwide of exactly those details. [One of his emailed warnings](#) surfaced in 2006, offering Congressmen every bit as hypocritical and inept as Jason a chance to pretend they were shocked, shocked. Yeah, right: prior to Mike's cheating, the TSA was an upstanding bureaucracy, free of cronyism, corruption, incompetence, fraud, and abuse of citizens.

Whether Mike or someone else sounded the alarm, employees at San Francisco International followed the undercover team's progress through the airport via camera, "[broadcast\[ing\] descriptions](#) and locations of testers to the checkpoints to assist supervisors in identifying testers and to facilitate passing the covert penetration tests," as a report from the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security put it. Yet when these shenanigans came to light, the [TSA's spokesman insisted](#), "At no time was the security of the airport in jeopardy." Really? If the cheating and the tests matter so little that they don't compromise the airport's security, why bother with the TSA at all?



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Like its cameras, the TSA is a joke. No research substantiates its checkpoint charade — not its procedures nor its underlying premise that passengers disarmed of everything but their fingernails survive armed hijackings better than those who can fight back. There are undoubtedly more effective ways to protect flights than forcing us to shuffle barefoot across dirty floors, but the TSA prevents our finding out by imposing its whims on aviation.

If we truly want to “prevent hostile activity in the aviation environment,” as mendacious Mike put it, we’ll abolish the TSA.

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