



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on November 17, 2010

Napolitano Sees Security Through Statist Lenses

Secretary Janet Napolitano has written an opinion piece defending her cabinet office, the Department of Homeland Security, and its tactics allegedly needed to prevent terrorist attacks on American airline flights. The secretary focused, particularly, on AIT (Advanced Imaging Technology) in use nationwide.



She contends that most passengers prefer this to “alternative screening measures.” Secretary Napolitano assures that “Rigorous privacy safeguards are in place” to protect passengers and notes that the officer who actually views the screening does not see the passenger. The [Internet](#), however, is flooded with explicit scans which belie the notion that somehow these images are protected from public view.

Janet Napolitano presents a bleak picture: either Americans are going to have to submit to increasingly invasive and degrading inspections by officious federal employees or they may face another terrorist attack.

As is true with all statist, Napolitano ignores the obvious solution: private property rights. If a suspected character showed up at a homeowner’s front door, he would simply tell that person he was not welcome in his home. If, for whatever reason, he chose to have this fellow come in, then no one would think it unreasonable for him to pat the suspected character down and make him empty his pockets. If the suspect refused the search, the homeowner would simply deny him any right to come into his home.

When private rights prevail, then each person with a property interest can act “unreasonably” if he wishes. Society has drifted so much toward the communal (or, perhaps better, the communist) interpretation of property and people that the idea of private airlines creating their own standards of inspection or of having airports sold to private companies simply never occurs to many people. What if government surrendered all rights to limit how private citizens and private businesses operated? Then “common carriers” would become private carriers. If the private company operating an airline or an airport wanted to selectively screen certain passengers, or perhaps not even carry certain passengers, that would be entirely the company’s business.

Because terrorist attacks on airlines are very bad for business, the private concern would think creatively and hard about how best to protect their passengers, and because technological “strip searches” are also very bad for business, the company would also make the necessary security precautions as innocuous to ordinary passengers as possible. Private enterprise could also respond much more quickly than nabobs such as Napolitano, who must weigh the political consequences of everything she does. Businesses unmolested by government could act rationally rather than politically.



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What is true for airlines is also true for every other business that currently is prohibited from discriminating against people based upon perfectly reasonable grounds — for example, if the person entering a shop is a young male Muslim who looks suspicious.

America was not founded upon the notion that citizens and their property and enterprises subordinated the right of self-defense to government officials. Armed citizens were perfectly acceptable means of restraining street crime and burglary. Railroad lines and stage coaches exercised judgment, balancing a number of factors — all of which ultimately related to the well-being of their passengers — to either refuse to carry certain people or to place their own restrictions on how certain passengers could travel.

It is quite true that some private businesses have been racially bigoted or religiously intolerant. Those businesses, when they behaved irrationally from a standard of market economics, were doomed to the margins of business. The marketplace is much more effective at punishing hateful nonsense than any bureaucrats or law courts. If, today, all the public components of transportation were privatized and all airlines and other common carriers were liberated from any requirement to be “fair” in deciding whom to carry and whom to not carry, then the endless rat’s maze of government-enforced security against terrorism would become unimportant. Passengers would have the best possible balance of convenience and safety. Private property and individual liberty — conduct ungoverned by the state — works, even in an area such as counterterrorism, which seems to demand larger and more intrusive government.

Photo: Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano speaks at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, Nov. 15, 2010.; AP Images



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