



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 10, 2015

Senate Hearing: TSA Whistleblowers' Policy Concerns Not Heeded

During a Senate hearing on Tuesday, Transportation Security Administration whistleblowers described a culture of “fear and mistrust” at the agency, where they were discouraged from raising policy concerns, including about TSA PreCheck, which permits expedited screening for passengers. Tuesday’s testimony added further fuel to criticisms of the agency.

Fox News reports that the hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee follows the [recent Inspector General report](#) on the TSA which revealed that undercover agents had been able to sneak fake explosives and banned weapons through dozens of airports across the country 96 percent of the time. Another embarrassing [report](#), released Monday, showed that the TSA failed to flag 73 commercial airport workers who have been “linked to terrorism.”

During Tuesday’s testimony, TSA whistleblowers claimed that they have been discouraged from raising concerns about screening procedures. “TSA is handing out PreCheck status like Halloween candy in an effort to expedite passengers as quickly as possible, despite the self-admitted security gaps that are being created by the process,” said Rebecca Roering, an assistant TSA federal security director at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. She stated that when she expressed concerns about the PreCheck program, she was told to “watch” what she said.

According to Jennifer Grover of the Government Accountability Office, who served as a witness at the hearing, though the agency has enrolled only one million passengers in the PreCheck program, “about 7.2 million travelers routinely get PreCheck boarding pass stamps, many because of their affiliation with [the] US military, or other groups.”

Concerns about the PreCheck program were validated by a March report by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General that showed the TSA had granted PreCheck status to a convicted felon, who flew last June, as reported by a TSA whistleblower.

Roering places much of the blame for the TSA’s ineptitude on the agency’s desire to place “more emphasis on customer service and passenger wait times than on security and detection rates.”

But after 12 years of inappropriate behavior by TSA agents, ranging from illegal groping and theft to downloading photos from the naked body scanners and more, many find it difficult to accept that customer service is a top priority for this agency.





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A scathing June 8 editorial by James Bovard in *USA Today* underscores the violations that have taken place at the hands of the TSA, ranging from constitutional to health-related:

In 2010, TSA [expedited](#) deploying of [whole body scanners](#) that captured [nude images](#) of travelers. The Electronic Privacy Information Center [labeled](#) the scanners “One of the most sweeping, most invasive and most unaccountable suspicionless searches of American travelers in history.” Travelers who objected to the [see-all scanners](#) were often intentionally brutalized with “enhanced” pat-downs to teach them a lesson. USA TODAY [reported](#) that, “the new searches ... require screeners to touch passengers’ breasts and genitals.” TSA has also been caught repeatedly lying about the scanner’s health perils; a [PBS-ProPublica](#) report revealed that one type of widely-used scanner (which was [discontinued](#) in 2013) could cause [six to 100](#) cancer cases per year among travelers. The fact that the TSA agents failed 95% of the recent undercover tests proves that the whole body scanners are far less reliable than the agency claimed.

Despite the whistleblowers’ testimony on Tuesday, it is clear that the poorly run TSA PreCheck program is a drop in the bucket compared to many of the TSA policies and procedures that need to be re-evaluated.

In March, The Intercept obtained a confidential TSA document that turned out to be the TSA’s secret checklist of dangerous traveler behaviors for which agents are to be on the lookout. The list includes exaggerated yawning, widely open staring eyes, rubbing or wringing of hands, and excessive complaints about the screening process, in case anyone dares to bemoan the seemingly endless screening procedures that accompany air travel.

“Spot Referral Report” is a [92-point checklist](#) divided into various categories that include a preliminary “observation and behavior analysis.” Passengers who are targeted for additional inspection are then assessed based on two more categories: whether they are traveling with “unusual items,” such as almanacs and “numerous prepaid calling cards or cell phones,” and a final category for “signs of deception,” which include “cover[ing] mouth with hand when speaking” and “fast eye blink rate.”

A 2013 evaluation of SPOT by the inspector general [found](#) that the TSA had failed to properly evaluate SPOT, and therefore “cannot ensure that passengers at United States airports are screened objectively, show that the program is cost-effective, or reasonably justify the program’s expansion.”

And still, the TSA has continued to train thousands of Behavior Detection Officers. According to the General Accounting Office, the program has cost more than \$900 million since it began in 2007.

Tuesday’s hearing was lawmakers’ first opportunity to question officials regarding the findings from last week’s report on the TSA’s 96 percent failure rate.

The hearing, however, came to a sudden end when Capitol police announced that they had received a bomb threat in the room adjacent to the hearing and ordered an evacuation, according to Russia Today. What better proof for the continued need for the inconsequentially incapable TSA than a terrorist threat?

Only a federal agency could fail so many times and defy proper protocol and yet still be guaranteed a position on the payroll — that is, the *taxpayer-funded* payroll.

According to security expert Bruce Schneier, there is a simple explanation for that: What the TSA does is not security, but “security theater.”

“It’s infuriating,” Schneier told *Vanity Fair* in 2011. “We’re spending billions upon billions of dollars



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doing this — and it is almost entirely pointless. Not only is it not done right, but even if it was done right it would be the wrong thing to do.”

But according to Ludwig von Mises Institute chairman and CEO Lew Rockwell, focusing on the TSA’s ability to secure the airports misses the point entirely. “The DHS airport scam has nothing to do with security or ‘terror,’” he [blogged](#). “It’s about militarization, propaganda, spending, and getting us used to obeying every government order, no matter how outrageous. So, it’s been almost a complete success.”



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