



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on June 6, 2009

House Bill Limits Whole-body Imaging

Whole-body imaging technology uses radio waves to form a 360-degree, three-dimensional image of a person's body beneath their clothes. While this reveals any concealed items the person may be carrying, it also reveals the person's body in a fair amount of detail. The Transportation Security Administration [tries to reassure travelers](#) by stating that the images "cannot be stored, transmitted or printed," and they are "deleted immediately once viewed." The TSA adds that "all facial images are blurred." Persons with artificial limbs, joint replacements, or an aversion to a pat-down search that takes two to four minutes can opt for this procedure, which the TSA describes as only taking about 15 seconds.



[The Salt Lake Tribune on June 4](#) gave some of the reasons Chaffetz opposed making whole-body imaging the sole or primary method of screening. He noted that the images are so clear the TSA operator can see the "difference between a dime and a nickel" and could identify the person in the image if the face were not blurred. Speaking of the balancing act required, Chaffetz said "there comes a point when, in the name of safety and security, we overstep that line, and we have an invasion of privacy." He emphasized, "You don't need to look at my wife and eight-year-old daughter naked to secure that airplane."

The bill does not ban whole-body imaging. It seeks to make sure passengers know what is involved if they submit to the imaging, to ensure that the imaging is not used unless another screening method like metal detection presents an alert, to give passengers options that fit their comfort level if an alert condition is detected, and to allow the punishment of any TSA official who "knowingly stores, transfers, shares, or copies an image" with up to three years imprisonment and/or a fine.

A question still remains: Does this bill actually give airline passengers any real choice in the matter? They can submit to a virtual strip search or a more hands-on groping. Does Chaffetz actually prefer that someone lays hands on his wife rather than merely seeing her unclothed on a computer screen with her face blurred out? Neither option is appealing.

While H.R. 2027 seems well intended, perhaps the worst thing is that the whole matter is in the hands of government in the first place. The Transportation Security Administration has given the federal government vast power over U.S. air travel, with all the expense, ineptness, and potential for abuse that comes with big-government bureaucracy. Heaven help the innocent person whose name shows up on the no-fly list by mistake or who is having a bad day and makes a scene at a security checkpoint!

Even if Americans are personally comfortable with being strip searched or groped, they would do well to consider [the words of Benjamin Franklin](#): "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."



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