

Bag Check III by Dan Jacoby

We're now in our fourth week of having our bags searched before getting into the subway. Of course, most of us haven't had the "pleasure". In fact, many of us haven't even seen bag checks in operation.

So, after all the fanfare, where are they?

First of all, each bag search is terribly expensive. Five police officers, along with a bunch of equipment, cost a lot of money. So there is a limit to how many stations they can monitor. With 468 stations in the system, that means it could be a long time before they get to where you are.

The second problem is the underlying belief, even among those who are doing the searches, that these searches are unconstitutional. It must be hard to find enough police who are either unwilling to consider the rights of the people, or willing to forget about freedom and liberty and "just follow orders".

But the major problem is that these searches actually make things worse.

There are two reasons why the searches are counterproductive. The first is the fact that there is absolutely no chance that they will stop, deter, or catch even one terrorist. Since the stated purpose of the searches is to stop, deter, or catch terrorists, this is a problem. If the bag searches were to be carried out on a larger scale, people might feel safer. Since they wouldn't actually be safer, this false sense of security would make us all less likely to be watching for odd behavior, which means the terrorists have that much better opportunity to complete their mission.

The second reason the searches are counterproductive is that they take police off their usual beats in order to search bags. With fewer police doing their real jobs – preventing crime and catching criminals – the crime rate will go up. If several hundred police are assigned to bag searches, this rise in crime would be noticed.

The last thing a mayor running for re-election needs is a rise in the crime rate.

The answer is to assign very few police to these ridiculous, ineffective, and almost certainly illegal searches, then hope nobody notices. Of course, the mayor could just admit that bag searches are a monumentally stupid idea. But then he'd have to admit he has no clue how to keep us safe.

Correction to an earlier statement: The last thing a mayor running for re-election needs is to admit he doesn't have a clue.

The problem, of course, is that this mayor, who is running for re-election, doesn't have a clue.