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By Rep. Tom Rooney

Letter to the Editor of the [Palm Beach Post](#)

Friday, Nov. 26

Your Tuesday editorial, "Opt for safety, not politics," suggests that opposition to new Transportation Security Administration procedures may be an attempt to score political points. I could not disagree more. This is not about politics; it's about basic rights.

Ironically, while The Palm Beach Post asserts that we should ask innocent Americans to set aside their Fourth Amendment rights, the paper has opposed the Patriot Act, which helps intelligence and law-enforcement officials target and investigate terrorists and terrorist supporters. Unlike the new TSA guidelines, the Patriot Act does not impact innocent Americans and is applied based on evidence, not randomness. But the newspaper denounced the Patriot Act as "heavy-handed intrusions of privacy." The Post has it backward; instituting full-body pat-downs on innocent Americans whose only "crime" is trying to fly home is a far more heavy-handed, intrusive policy than tapping the phones of terrorists and their supporters.

I object to any policy that subjects innocent Americans, including seniors and children, to full-body pat-downs that border on sexual assault. I object to forcing a cancer survivor to choose between walking through a machine that emits radiation and having to remove her breast prosthesis.

The editorial claims that these full-body screenings and open-handed pat-downs are necessary to prevent another case like last December's "underwear bomber," who flew from his home country of Nigeria to Amsterdam, and then attempted to blow up his plane en route to Detroit. The editorial does not mention that this terrorist, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, should never

have been allowed to board a plane to the United States.

His own father went to the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria and reported to two CIA officers that he was suspicious of his son's extremist views. The son's name was added to the terrorist database maintained by the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, but shockingly was not added to the FBI's terrorist screening database or the no-fly list. We didn't need a pat-down to stop Abdulmutallab; we needed better coordination among our intelligence and security agencies.

Screening random Americans as they board planes in American airports, of course, does nothing to protect us from noncitizens boarding planes in other countries. But more important, should we allow one person who wasn't screened properly in a foreign country to change the way we live and travel, and to rob citizens of their Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches? Should we ask American citizens to sacrifice their rights and privacy while our own government fails to keep suspected terrorists out of the country? Do we think that patting down random citizens is more effective than dispatching bomb-sniffing dogs to screen passengers and cargo?

People should expect more from their government than this overreach. There always will be risks, but rather than treating all Americans like terrorists and asking them to sacrifice their rights, let's start by looking at noncitizens from areas of interest, and make sure that where red flags are raised, we follow through.

We could learn from Israel, which faces threats daily from its neighbors, and many countries in Europe, which have been fighting airline terrorists for the past few decades. None of these countries subjects its citizens to the level of unreasonable, overly invasive search that TSA has asked American citizens to endure. Let's get the policies right before we sacrifice the freedoms of American citizens out of fear.

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Editor's note: Tom Rooney represents Florida's 16th Congressional District. He must go through the airport screening process.

