Letter to the editor about airport security

Science, Social Science

To the Editor: For " Airport Pasta-Sauce Interdiction Considered Harmful bruce. schneier@wired. com I totally agree with Mr. Schneier's article " Airport Pasta-Sauce Interdiction Considered Harmful". There are days when I think Osama bin Laden's master plan was not to take down the Twin Towers, but to snarl airport traffic across America. In the hysteria that followed 9/11, security has tightened beyond reason. In an effort to make our air travel safe, the American people have given up some of their basic rights. Some of these basic rights include the right to have water, shampoo, or even pasta sauce on flights.

Jokes aside, the point of airport security is to provide security. Mr. Schneier's statement " There are two classes of contraband at airport security checkpoints: the class that will get you in trouble if you try to bring it on an airplane, and the class that will cheerily be taken away from you if you try to bring it on an airplane" is true. The news reports on incidents regarding bombs, guns, and explosives confiscated at airports, but rarely are airports shut down over a passenger carrying pasta sauce, fingernail clippers, water, or shampoo. If the items in the class of being taken away with the passenger still being allowed to board the plane are so dangerous, why are they stored in big bins out in the open? The answer is simple, these items are not dangerous.

If these items are not dangerous, why does airport security take them? Airport security takes these simple items because it makes them feel safe. Not only does it make the airport security feel safe, but the airline passengers as well. We might all complain about the long lines and inconvenience, but figure that all that fuss must make us safe. The question

becomes do we really want to be safe, or do we want to feel safe? I believe the answer subconsciously is Americans want to feel safe. Feeling safe is not only better for the peace of mind, but can be used as an excuse if anything does happen. After 9/11, Americans looked back at the warning signs. What if we would have taken the Russian warning more seriously, what if we would have take Osama bin Laden more seriously, what if we would have never gotten involved in the first Gulf War, what if we would have had stricter airport security? All of these doubts gnawed at the American public. Today if the same events as 9/11 happened, Americans could say that they are doing everything possible to prevent terrorism. The feeling of safety is more important than actual safety.

Real safety needs to be considered more important than feeling safe. Only known weapons should be banned at airports. All of the other items are just distractions that help the terrorists. All a terrorist needs to blow up a terminal today is a jar of pasta sauce filled with explosives. When the guard " cheerfully" throws the terrorist's pasta sauce, the explosive will blow up. If an item is dangerous, then it should be treated dangerous.

Maybe Americans need to adopt a few Israeli techniques. It would make everyone happy. A bottle of water is opened at an IDF (Israel Defense Forces) barricade. The IDF soldier offers the water to the passenger, if they decline it is confiscated. I am sure if Mr. Schneier would have been asked to taste his pasta sauce, he would have. Shampoo could be rubbed on the passenger's skin. Lotion could be used the same way. The terrorist would refuse, but the legitimate passenger would be happy to oblige. This would truly make American feel safe and be safe.