

WASHINGTON -- Imagine, for a moment, if airport body scan images of U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson turned up on the Internet.

At least folks might get some insight into the true nature of the Nebraska Democrat's famously helmet-like hairdo.

The images produced by the body scanners tend more toward fuzzy white outlines than glossy, centerfold quality. But they have proved revealing enough to make any traveler uncomfortable, particularly when they contemplate the potential for their images to be distributed online.

In response to constituent complaints about the scanners, Nelson is pushing an amendment that would make it a felony to save or distribute the body scanner images from any airport or federal building. Penalties would include up to a year in prison and up to a \$100,000 fine.

It's an issue members of Congress confront personally, given how often they pass through airport security.

Nelson said he skips the scanners, in part out of concern for what might happen to the images. He conceded to The World-Herald that the gossip site TMZ would hardly clamor as hard for his scans as for Paris Hilton's.

"I'm sure I wouldn't attract the same level of attention, but I don't want it to be embarrassing to my family," Nelson said.

Body scanners are used at airports around the country, including Omaha's Eppley Airfield. Federal security officials have said there are ample safeguards to prevent the images from being saved or publicly released. Still, according to news reports, 35,000 body scanner images made at a Florida courthouse were retained and 100 now are available on the Internet.

Nelson said he realizes that some people might break the law despite the penalties.

"And when they do, they'll go to jail or they'll pay a \$100,000 fine," Nelson said. "That's how you deal with that."

Still, Nebraska's other U.S. senator, Republican Mike Johanns, questioned whether creating a new felony is the best way to go. The last thing anyone wants is his scanned image on the Internet, he said, but felonies are serious business.

"I want to accomplish privacy, but I also want to be mindful that a felony charge really is a life-altering situation, and we're not talking about somebody knocking off the local bank or liquor

store -- we're talking about an image that somehow got out," Johanns said. "I wouldn't appreciate it if it were my image, but that's the piece of this where I'd really want to study that legislation very carefully."

Johanns has been singled out before by airport security agents for a pat-down and a spin through the body scanner.

He stressed the need to protect the traveling public's privacy and expressed a certain indifference about the distribution of his own image.

"If somebody wants to look at the image of Mike Johanns, you know, whatever," Johanns said.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, was tapped for both the body scanner and a pat-down as he went through Eppley security on Tuesday. He described the pat-down as "plenty personal" and said it drove home the public's complaints about the new security procedures.

Still, King called Nelson's proposal to make a felony out of releasing the scanner images an overreaction.

"We can do something better than that," King said. "If it's a bad policy, let's just change it."

Nebraska's three Republican members of the House also look askance at the scanners.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry has criticized new airport security procedures as overly intrusive. Personally, he said, he goes with the pat-down, though not out of concern that he'll wind up online in his birthday suit.

Rep. Adrian Smith said he hasn't yet encountered the scanners when flying out of Washington. When he returns, he typically flies out of Scottsbluff, which doesn't have them. He does have concerns about the intrusive nature of airport security procedures and said they could use more common sense, but he said he hadn't had a chance to study Nelson's proposal.

**Rep. Lee Terry** expressed support for Nelson's amendment but said he'd prefer to ditch the machines altogether, calling them too intrusive.

"You never know about that one rogue operator, you know, when some Sports Illustrated swimsuit model comes through, they show up on the Internet afterwards," Terry said. "I think it's a legitimate concern that people have -- showing your junk to somebody else, and some people, celebrities in particular, I think are vulnerable to having it show up (on the Internet)."

Terry said he has been through the scanners but was less concerned about modesty than missing his flight, because the process was so time-consuming. He described the alternative pat-down procedure as pretty intrusive as well.

Something like that "on the street," he said, "would probably cost 20 bucks."



