

AN AIRPLANE WINDOW ON MITT'S THINKING

Let me start by saying I'm grateful that Ann Romney—as well as the pilot and co-pilot who were in the cockpit of Ann's chartered plane where a fire broke out Friday, forcing them to make an emergency landing—are safe. I'm sure the entire episode was frightening and I'm happy that the pilots didn't panic about the fire.

But now that she is safe—but looking ahead to six more solid weeks of chartered air travel—I'm surprised by Mitt's problem solving process. The solution to this scare, Mitt says, is to make it possible to open windows on planes.

"I appreciate the fact that she is on the ground, safe and sound. And I don't think she knows just how worried some of us were," Romney said. "When you have a fire in an aircraft, there's no place to go, exactly, there's no — and you can't find any oxygen from outside the aircraft to get in the aircraft, because the windows don't open. I don't know why they don't do that. It's a real problem. So it's very dangerous. And she was choking and rubbing her eyes. Fortunately, there was enough oxygen for the pilot and copilot to make a safe landing in Denver. But she's safe and sound."

Never mind the obvious reasons you can't have windows that open on jets, never mind the additional problems introduced if you tried to have open windows in the cockpit, where the fire and smoke—and therefore the greatest risk—broke out.

I'm more interested in what this says about Mitt's problem solving.

If it were my spouse on the plane, I'd want to know the cause of the fire—preliminarily they

say electrical problems—and more importantly why it wasn't prevented. On a commercial jet, a pilot would have to follow a pre-flight protocol to try to identify any failures; did this charter? On a commercial jet, you'd have the maintenance schedules to track whether someone overlooked an electrical problem; did this charter jet?

The charter company Mitt uses most—Air Charter Team—is a broker. It doesn't operate or staff the planes involved. They contract out to other operators. They ensure the safety of the planes they deal with by contracting with a research company to grade the teams they use.

Air Charter Team has contracted with Aviation Research Group (ARG/US) to provide our customers with comprehensive safety information on the charter operators and pilots we utilize on your behalf. The report our company receives on each air charter operator and pilot gives us the background and safety information we need to make a sensible decision on who to use for your private jet charters.

[snip]

The CHEQ report (Charter Evaluation and Qualification report) has three major components that air charter companies use: historical safety ratings, current aircraft and pilot background checks, and on-site safety audits. Analysis of these components results in four potential levels of safety rating: DNQ, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Each level reflects analysis and ranking based on increasing amounts of detailed information on the charter operator.

If it were my spouse who had had an emergency landing on a charter my campaign was using (and presumably would use for the next six weeks), I'd want to double check this assurance. Was Ann

on a Platinum graded plane? Were the reports in the plane's historical aircraft checks accurate?

That is, I'd want to know if the subcontractors my contracted service was using were fulfilling my needs. But not Mitt. This guy—a guy with a JD/MBA—thinks first of a way to minimize the damage from a fire that would be dangerous under any circumstances, rather than ensuring very obviously procedural means to try to avoid a fire were in place.

Such a method of problem solving—even a problem that affects him personally—doesn't say much about what kind of problem solving he'd do as a President.

Update: According to the pool reporter, Mitt was joking about the windows.