



The Video Channel That Challenges The Status-Quo

Senate Hearings December 4, 2024

Airline “Junk” Fees

*Looking At The Facts, Hype,
Doggerel and Misinformation*

*This subcommittee has also misled the
public with non-factual claims and
accusations*

Aviation Unscripted

WITH
Mike Boyd

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Cutting to the bottom line...

On December 4, the Senate held hearings on what were described as airline “junk” fees. The unquestioned premises of the subcommittee and the pre-conclusions of the committee, before the hearings even started were:

- *Airlines are colluding to gouge passengers with fees*
- *Airlines intentionally hide fees until after the booking*
- *Airlines are colluding to develop “means tested” individual passenger fares*
- *Airlines are trying to stop efforts to make fees transparent*
- *Airlines force consumers into giving pre-booking personal info they can misuse.*



How the hearings were pre-determined

None of these pre-conceived conclusions are accurate.

In fact, as stated in the hearings, they are misleading.

In a few, they are rampantly false.

BUT

The hard reality is that the airline industry has unfortunately encouraged negative views by inept and in some cases stupid implementation of rules and fees that are in fact viewed as anti-consumer. It is that perception, and it's reality for now.



Okay, let's review the questions and positions of each of the four senators participating at this hearing.

The comments are on the left, with factual review on the right of each.



First, The Airline Introductions



Each airline presented the perfunctory outline of its service and philosophy. United drilled directly and professionally into pointing out it has been reducing fees for certain services and other specific customer service initiatives.

However, the enormously-backfiring Frontier “bag bounty” program as well as its confusing array of fee rates became a *cause celebre* that spattered mud unnecessarily on the other carriers. The Frontier rep was poorly prepared to respond to Senator Hawley’s legitimate inquiries regarding fee variances.



Chairman Senator Blumenthal



Claims airlines hide seat fees from customers

Not true. Take a try at booking on AA or NK or DL. The fees are there.

Claims airlines will charge fares based on means-testing for each passenger

A repeated thread from the sub-committee, which is fatal to their credibility.

Claims that airlines intentionally charge family seat fees

When a family of four booked after the freebies were gone, they had to pay the (silly) “choice seat” fee like everybody else. For an identical seat, by the way. Family exemptions are now in place. Airlines got themselves into this one.

Accuses airlines of trying to stop fare transparency

The bill demanding transparency is bogus, and implies there are routinely hidden fees after the booking.



Chairman Senator Blumenthal



Accused airlines of charging for services that do not entail more expense.

Accused airlines of intending to set fares based on passenger-to-passenger personal information.

Confused the difference between opting for a higher level of service over the base economy fare and the consumer decision to upgrade.

Maintained that since a seat with more legroom costs the airline no more than another seat, an upgrade fee was outrageous. The value to the passenger is the issue, Senator. Penalty points here.

The comments about charging fares based on specific passenger data were babbling and irresponsible nonsense. More penalty points to the sub-committee.



Chairman Senator Blumenthal



Hit hard on Frontier “bag bounty” paying gate staff to catch passengers with oversize – any centimeter of overisize -carry-on

Played a video of an interaction where a passenger was denied boarding over a gatebag dispute. *Pay \$99 bucks or stay home.*

The senator denounced the program where F9 pays gate staff to ferret out passengers whose carry-on does not meet their size standards. Just enforcing the “rule” has been replaced by incentives to find “offenders.” Award this one to Senator Blumenthal.

The video shows that this policy as implemented comes across like extortion. Pay a huge sudden fee or you don’t get on. Not acceptable customer service.

Charging them a last-minute \$99 fee is punitive, not good service.



Chairman Senator Blumenthal



F9 & Spirit are using algorithms to target specific passengers & charge them higher fares

Claims seat fees are evil

Claims no expense for checked bags

This is supposition based on his pre-conceived bias, not facts. Connected to the dishonest claim that airlines first collect personal info and use it to adjust fares when bookings are made.

Agreed, fees for “choice seats” that have no variance with others is just fear-mongering that all will be left are middle seats. Airlines should expect criticism.

Sorry, senator. It does cost manpower and other factors to handle a checked bag. Your claim to the contrary erodes your credibility.



Ranking Member Senator Marshall

Implies that credit card rewards programs gouge passengers

Claims the “swipe fee” of 3% gouges the card holder

States that these incestuous bank/airline deals are non-competitive

Spirit implied that this allows market dominance by majors



A confusing interaction that conflated credit card fees with incentive programs and with frequent flier systems.

The senator has a pending bill to regulate airline credit card programs.



Senator Hassan



Accused United and Delta of not guaranteeing that families can sit together without extra fees

Accuses airlines that demand passengers provide personal information before revealing total fees.

The good senator made false claims about the above.

Airlines clearly explained that they make efforts to put families together, and in any case exempt families from seating fees.

Her claim that booking starts with personal info before fares are displayed is complete dishonest garbage. That info is after flight and fee selection.

That info is federally required to book a seat.

Really ill-informed righteous babble that did nothing but mis-inform the public. She does not know what she is righteously talking about.



Senator Hawley



Drilled into the policy at Frontier of paying agents to seek out oversize carry-on and get a “bounty”

Notes different bag fees for different customers – between \$15 and \$99.

Says pax must enter personal info before they see total cost.

The Frontier bag-bounty system was correctly called out. To be clear, it is a service disaster that makes the airline look like gate Gestapo. It’s not a program for “fairness” when the fee at the gate is a punitive \$99. Senator Hawley is on the money.

Unfortunately, the Frontier rep was clueless to explain how the fees varied by passengers on the same flight. Looked inept.

Regarding the personal info issue, Hawley needs to do some homework. He’s wrong.



Correcting The Senators

The sub-committee members stated incorrectly that Spirit demands personal info before the consumer knows the cost.

The process starts with the cost as chosen and then goes into the necessary personal info. That's well after the fare and fee info are disclosed.

The implication is that airlines collect personal info and use it to set the fare. A dishonest and obviously wrong conclusion

Sorry, Senators, you should be more versed before doing any more hearings. This denigrates your entire credibility.

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BOOK MY TRIPS CHECK IN FLIGHT STATUS TRAVEL INFO **spirit** LOYALTY DEALS CONTACT US SIGN-IN ES

Show Fares In **DOLLARS** **SC** FARES POINTS POINTS+CASH Sort by # OF STOPS

1. Depart - Sat, Dec 7
Salt Lake City, UT (SLC) to Miami, FL (MIA)

n/a Wed, Dec 4	n/a Thu, Dec 5	\$612 Fri, Dec 6	\$612 Sat, Dec 7	SAVE \$380 \$232 Sun, Dec 8	SAVE \$433 \$179 Mon, Dec 9	n/a Tue, Dec 10
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COMPARE OPTIONS
Find the best fit for you.

	Go	Go Savvy	Go Comfy	Go Big
1 Personal Item Smaller than 18"x14"x8"	✓	✓	✓	✓
1 Carry-On Bag Maximum of 22"x18"x10"	Not Allowed	Carry-On Bag or Checked Bag	✓	✓
1 Checked Bag			✓	✓

The fare and fees and routing are chosen before the customer enters any personal data! This panel is flat wrong.

Senator Hassan accused the airlines of using personal data to set fares. This sub-committee is misleading the public.



The bottom line:

The tone and tenor and information expressed by this subcommittee must be a wake-up call to the airline industry.

Message: *manage this situation*. As a starting point, considering passengers the enemy seeking to cheat the airline is a red flag that there are problems on the airline side that encourage the misinformation and confusion we saw in congress.



Thanks for watching!

Any questions or comments or input are eagerly accepted.



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