



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio  
Chairman  
---

Katherine W. Dedrick, Staff Director

Sam Graves  
Ranking Member  
---

Paul J. Sass, Republican Staff Director

May 14, 2020

Mr. George D. Novak  
President and CEO  
National Air Carrier Association (NACA)  
1735 N. Lynn Street  
Suite 105  
Arlington, VA 22209-3928

Dear Mr. Novak:

I am troubled by a recent photo shared on social media and highlighted in news reports that depicts the cabin of a full Boeing 737 operating a flight from Newark to San Francisco by a major U.S. airline. Despite Centers for Disease Control recommendations regarding social distancing, the picture shows nearly every seat is filled. And although many passengers are wearing masks or other protective face coverings, they look worried. In fact, a physician on the flight tweeted that passengers were “scared” and “shocked” by the absence of social distancing on board. I would be, too, if I were about to spend the next five hours sealed in a tube with up to 184 passengers, all seated inches from one another, and any number of whom could be a carrier of COVID-19. Who among the CEOs of your association’s members would want a member of their own family to be assigned to a middle seat between two potentially contagious passengers in the middle of a global pandemic?

The photo referenced above is by no means the only photo I have recently come across depicting passengers on full or nearly full airplanes operated by most of the major U.S. carriers. I’m concerned this scenario will become more commonplace as an increasing number of state governors, in the absence of clear and consistent direction from the White House, pursue an ill-advised plan to end the public health measures that have saved lives, which in turn may encourage more people to travel even when it’s not absolutely necessary for them to do so.

Of course, I am cognizant of the financial devastation that the coronavirus pandemic has wrought upon the Nation’s airlines, which remain critically important to our national security and the movement of essential workers and cargo. The airlines must be able to generate revenue to remain solvent because a sustainable, viable airline system is in the public interest. But filling planes with travelers who are paying rock-bottom, below-cost airfares, simply to boost load factors or

Mr. George D. Novak  
May 14, 2020  
Page 2

preserve market share, both exacerbates losses and endangers public health and welfare. And that strategy has never delivered an airline from insolvency; in fact, it has driven many out of business.

I appreciate that even in the absence of leadership from the Executive Branch, many airlines have voluntarily taken on measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to protect crewmembers and those who still need to travel during this health crisis. I urge you to continue to put health and well-being first.

In that spirit, I would respectfully urge NACA members to ensure that their reservation systems leave at least one seat-width of spacing between passengers and to dynamically adjust fares as needed to account for the effect on load factors. On narrow-body aircraft, this would reduce the maximum load factor to roughly 67 percent. The pandemic requires short-term adjustment on the part of every stakeholder, and the sooner we can defeat this insidious virus, the sooner the American public will feel confident about buying airline tickets and traveling again.

Please share this letter with NACA members. I have written a similar letter to Nicholas Calio with Airlines for America. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



PETER A. DeFAZIO  
Chairman