

CAA Flashback & Fact Check

United Airlines Once Again Using Fear Tactics to Block Competition & Affordability for Air Travelers

Airline Has Track Record Of Using Threatening Rhetoric Only To Later Reverse Course

In a recent meeting with the Washington Post editorial board, United Airlines chief executive Scott Kirby reverted to what should be a now-familiar playbook for aviation history buffs by claiming that United would be forced to cut flights at Dulles International Airport if new flights are approved by Congress at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA).

According to the *Washington Post*:

- *[Kirby] explained that IAD has become an international hub because United can count on enough passengers coming in via long-haul domestic flights from the West Coast. Giving such flights to DCA would make it untenable to continue direct service to destinations such as Ghana and Jordan, limiting regional travelers' options.*

Notably, the Post editorial board appears not to have pressed Kirby on United's history of making those same threats in another high-profile airport battle only to take the exact opposite position after they lost the policy fight.

Here are the facts:

In 2012, Southwest announced it hoped to expand international service at the William P. Hobby Airport (HOU). But United Airlines – which controlled most of the flights at Houston's larger airport, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) - strongly opposed this effort and told the Houston City Council that it would have to cut flights and workers if the new flights were approved.

History is repeating itself today, as United Airlines is using some of the same arguments it did back then, including cuts to service.

In the end, after the Houston City Council rejected United's arguments, not only did United not cut service in Houston – they expanded it.

Read the record:

WHAT THEY SAID: Southwest Airlines' Proposed Addition Of International Flights At HOU Would Lead To Thousands Of Lost Jobs And Hundreds Of Millions In Lost Revenue In Houston. "United believes this added competition means a loss of 3,700 jobs and nearly \$300 million

dollars a year to Houston.” (“Southwest vs. United: The Real Truth Involving Hobby Airport,” [Houston Public Media](#), Edel Howlin, 5/11/12)

- **Additionally, United Airlines Threatened That Competition At HOU Would Force Them To Reconsider Their Investment In Houston, Specifically at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH).** “United has warned that the Hobby project would force the airline to reconsider its future infrastructure investment in Bush Intercontinental, including its decision to put its newer, bigger airplanes there.” (“War Between United, Southwest Looms Over Houston”, [Chron](#), Kiah Collier and Chris Moran, 3/17/12)

IN REALITY: United Recently Rolled Out A Growth Strategy That Included The Largest Wide-Body Aircraft Order Ever Made By A U.S. Carrier And Hiring At least 1,800 Employees At IAH.

“The deal for the planes... is the largest wide-body aircraft order made by a U.S. carrier... the carrier [United Airlines] said it plans to add about 700 planes to its fleet between now and 2032. United's plans for growth also call for the airline to hire some 15,000 employees next year, including at least 1,800 at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport. (“United Expects To Add Nearly 2,000 Jobs At Houston's IAH Airport As Part Of Global Expansion,” [Houston Chronicle](#), Erica Grieder, 12/13/22)

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WHAT THEY SAID: United Airlines Would Be Forced To Cut Or Reduce Service To Airports Nationwide.

“The carrier [United Airlines] has previously warned that cities at risk for lost service include San Jose, California and Charlotte, NC, and reductions would also occur from Houston to Detroit and Louisville and Mazatlan, Mexico.” (“United Airlines Walks Away The Sore Loser After Southwest Wins International Expansion From Hobby,” [CAPA Analysis](#), 6/1/12)

IN REALITY:

- **In March of 2023, United Airlines Announced Larger Capacity On Flight From IAH To Louisville.** “The airline [United Airlines] is adding a new mainline service to Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport... The flight was previously on a 76-seat regional jet, but it will now seat 126 to 176 passengers. That's a capacity increase of 65% to 135%.” (“United Airlines Expands Capacity For Flights From Louisville To Houston,” [WDRB](#), 3/31/23)
- **In 2017, United Airlines Added More Nonstop Routes To Mazatlán Through IAH.** “United Airlines is making it easier to get to Mazatlán, announcing two new nonstop routes to the popular Mexican destination. The airline will offer the new routes from its hometown hub of Chicago O'Hare International Airport and its Latin America gateway at Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport.” (“United Announces New Routes To Mazatlan,” [Travel Pulse](#), Mia Taylor, 8/10/17)

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WHAT THEY SAID: More Flights At HOU Would Result In Longer Layovers And Longer Lines At U.S. Customs Because The Agency Would Have To Split Officers Between IAH And HOU.

“United also fears that equipping Hobby with a full-scale Customs and Border Protection facility

would force the federal government to split Customs officers between Hobby and Bush Intercontinental. Brian Znotins, United's managing director of international planning, said fewer Customs officers would result in longer lines and longer layovers and eventually would prompt more international air travelers to book flights through another hub." ("War Between United, Southwest Looms Over Houston", [Chron.](#), Kiah Collier and Chris Moran, 3/17/12)

IN REALITY: Recent Data Shows IAH's Wait Time At U.S. Customs Is About Average For International Airports Nationwide. ("Average Airport Immigration & Customs Wait Times Across the U.S. [2022 Data Study]", [Upgraded Points](#), Alex Miller, 5/28/23)

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