

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515–6143

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

June 30, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We are conducting oversight of the increasing rate of flight cancellations around the country and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (Department) failure to remedy this problem. The Department’s inaction is compounding these cancellations as 48 million Americans are expected to travel over the upcoming Independence Day weekend.¹ The Department may not directly control decisions to cancel flights, yet it continues to push unserious and out-of-touch solutions to complex problems, such as simply demanding that airlines hire more staff.² Rather than offer solutions, the Biden Administration is relying on excuses to respond to the foreseeable economic consequences of its war on domestic energy production and big-government COVID-19 response. The American people deserve a Department that works to ensure a robust domestic airline industry. We therefore write to request information about the Department’s strategy to reduce flight cancellations.

The airline industry was seriously harmed by COVID-19 lockdowns, with “[t]hree of the major air carriers—Delta, United, and American—cut[ting] dozens of routes and even some destinations altogether[.]”³ This in turn led to a mass departure or furloughing of pilots, which reports indicate “is going to go for the rest of the decade, and it’s only going to get worse.”⁴ Your recent meeting with airline executives in which you “urged airlines to hire more staff ahead of the looming July Fourth holiday weekend” did not amount to a significant change in the airlines’ strategy.⁵ In fact, the Department’s solution to a staffing shortage being simply to hire more people is indicative of the Biden Administration’s continued strategy of proposing overly

¹ Ellen Edmonds, *From Sea to Shining Sea: AAA Predicts 47.9 Million People Will Travel This July 4th*, AAA NEWSROOM (Jun. 21, 2022), available at <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2022/06/from-sea-to-shining-sea-aaa-predicts-47-9-million-people-will-travel-this-july-4th/>.

² Khaleda Rahman, *Flight Cancellations Surge as Buttigieg Demands Airlines Hire Staff*, NEWSWEEK (Jun. 19, 2022).

³ Adriana Belmonte, *Big airlines are cutting dozens of routes as travel rebounds amid pandemic*, YAHOO FINANCE (Dec. 17, 2021).

⁴ Adriana Belmonte, *The pilot shortage is ‘only going to get worse,’ union president says*, YAHOO FINANCE (Jun. 24, 2022).

⁵ *Supra*, n. 2.

simple solutions to complex problems of its own making. Like President Biden’s urging oil producers to simply cut prices of oil in the wake of gas prices exceeding \$5 per gallon,⁶ your solution to the problem of mass flight cancellations ignores the many variables contributing to this issue, including the Administration’s disastrous COVID-19 response and out-of-control spending that has brought the nation to the brink of a recession.⁷

With the Independence Day weekend approaching, airlines are set to experience an uptick in passengers. However, the past week demonstrated a severe lack of preparedness for the holiday, with over 770 flights cancelled on Monday, following “another chaotic travel weekend with more than 1,500 domestic flights cancelled Saturday and Sunday.”⁸ Meanwhile, major U.S. airlines traded blame with the Federal Aviation Administration over who was at fault.⁹ This is little comfort to the 3.5 million Americans who plan to travel this weekend to see family and friends and to celebrate the nation’s independence. Meanwhile, the prices for airline tickets are up 25 percent the past year.¹⁰ This is primarily due to the rising costs of fuel because of the Biden Administration’s inability to rein in inflation, which is the highest level in forty years at 8.6 percent.¹¹

Committee Republicans are concerned the Department does not have a serious plan to address deteriorating flight schedules, which will be made even more painfully clear to Americans across the country as their flights continue to be delayed or cancelled. We therefore request that you provide Committee Republican staff a briefing to explain your plans to use the tools at the Department’s disposal to ensure the airline industry is able to operate at peak efficiency without stranding millions of families across the country. Please make arrangements to schedule this briefing by July 7, 2022.

To schedule the briefing or to ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact Oversight Committee staff at (202) 225-5704. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

⁶ Francesca Chambers, *With gas prices at \$5 a gallon, Biden tells oil companies to cut costs for Americans*, USA TODAY (Jun. 15, 2022).

⁷ Ramishah Maruf, *All the recession warning signs this week*, CNN.COM (Jun. 28, 2022).

⁸ Chuck Johnston and Ramishah Maruf, *770 more flights canceled Monday after a chaotic travel weekend*, CNN.com (Jun. 27, 2022).

⁹ Ben Kessler, *US flight cancellations soar ahead of July 4th weekend*, N.Y. POST (Jun. 26, 2022).

¹⁰ Brett Holzhauer, *Airline ticket prices are up 25%, outpacing inflation — here are the ways you can still save*, CNBC.COM (Jun. 2, 2022).

¹¹ Christopher Rugaber, *US inflation at new 40-year high as price increases spread*, AP (Jun. 10, 2022).

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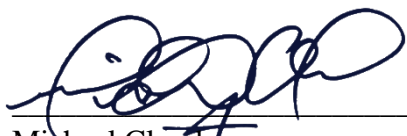
Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security



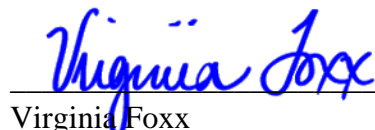
Michael Cloud
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic and
Consumer Policy



Ralph Norman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment



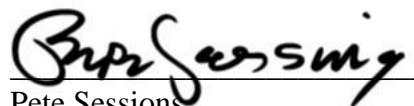
Nancy Mace
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and
Civil Liberties



Virginia Foxx
Member of Congress



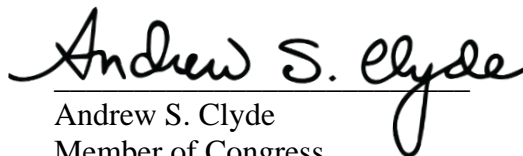
Bob Gibbs
Member of Congress



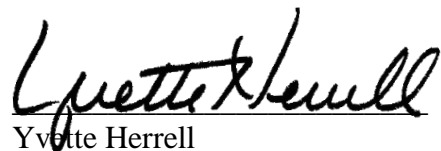
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Andrew S. Clyde
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Yvette Herrell
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Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

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cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

The Honorable Ro Khanna, Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Chairman
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties