



consumeraction



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 5, 2017

National Consumer League; John Breyault: (202) 207-2819
Alliance for Aviation Across America; Devin Osting: (202) 223-9523
Consumer Action; Linda Sherry: (202) 544-3088
FlyersRights.Org; Paul Hudson: (800) 662-1859
In The Public Interest; Donald Cohen: (619) 708-3367

**Big Airlines Keep Raking in Fees Yet Still Can't Manage Their Own Systems
*Aviation & Passenger Advocates Renew Opposition to Big Airline Led Air Traffic Control Takeover Push***

Washington, D.C. – In the latest in an endless litany of high-profile debacles, the big airlines experienced yet another high profile “glitch” last week allowing all American Airlines pilots to be able take vacation days in the last two weeks of December even if there wasn't another pilot available to operate the flight, resulting last week in thousands of flights which were unassigned to a pilot or co-pilot ahead of the crucial holiday travel period.

This embarrassing mishap comes on the heels of news that the airlines are raking in \$82 billion in fees from passengers this year. The airlines continue to put profits ahead of passengers and still can't seem to manage their own customer service, operations or technological systems – yet astonishingly, these same highly concentrated airlines continue to ask Congress and the public to trust them to run our air traffic control system.

The Airlines Can Scarcely Get Through a Week Without a Major Customer Service Incident or Technological Glitch:

- Just last week, American Airlines experienced an embarrassing glitch in its internal computer system, which allowed thousands of pilots to be granted time off, creating uncertainty for

passengers scheduled to fly over the holiday season. The fiasco created uncertainty as to whether there would be flight crews for more than **15,000 American flights scheduled between Dec. 17 and Dec. 31** " ([CBS News, November 2017](#)). This is far from an isolated occurrence.

- According to *Quartz*, the airlines average about **one major technical glitch a month**. But despite the situation, they refuse to invest in their antiquated technology ([Quartz](#)).
- According to Henry Hartevelt of Atmosphere Research Group, "some airlines are choosing to risk outages that might cost them \$20 million to \$40 million rather than invest, for example, \$100 million on technology upgrades" ([Reuters, August 2016](#)).
- In perhaps the most high-profile incidents of the year, Dr. Dao, a paying, ticket-holding United Airlines passenger that had been seated on the aircraft, was forcibly removed from the plane. As a result, Dr. Dao lost two teeth, broke his nose, and suffered a severe concussion ([NPR, April 2017](#)). It was soon revealed that 40,000 passengers per year are removed from their purchased seats due to overbooking ([DOT Air Travel Consumer Report](#)).
- Just recently, Southwest Airlines destroyed a car seat, which was checked as baggage, and a couple of weeks ago, a passenger was forced to hold her 18-month-old daughter in her lap, despite having a child seat and a ticketed seat for the child ([Forbes, November 2017](#), [WPRI-TV, November 2017](#)).
- Airlines continue to aggressively reduce seat size despite a 2017 appeal court decision questioning their safety ([CNN, July, 2017](#), [FlyersRights.Org, November 2017](#)) while encouraging each other to maintain "capacity discipline" to restrict the number of flights, keep planes full and prices artificially high ([USA Today July, 2015](#)).

The Big Airlines Are Making Record Profits and Have Collected \$82 Billion in Fees from Passengers

- Recent news articles last week reported that by the end of this year, non-ticket ancillary revenues from services for passengers **will top \$82 billion, a 264% increase from 2010** ([Forbes, November 2017](#)).
- Worldwide, North American airlines with less than a quarter of the flights now account for nearly half of total airline profits ([CNBC, December, 2017](#)).
- Industry analysts have noted the airlines' ability to get passengers to "pay for more than they anticipated they would." Just this year, merchandising and extra fees have caused passengers to spend an average of \$20.13 more than they planned to spend on the airlines ([Forbes, November 2017](#)).
- This is on the heels of another report from the Dallas Morning News which stated "t's been a few heady years for the airline industry, with a **stretch of record profits**" ([Dallas Morning News, December 2017](#)).
- In fact, the second quarter for United Airlines saw profit of \$818 million, an increase of 39 percent over the same quarter the previous year, and saw an increase in sales ([New York Times, July 2017](#)).

In light of the big airlines' ongoing serious operational and customer service failures, Congress should strongly reject the big airlines' air traffic control power grab and instead enact policies that strengthen passenger protections and open access.