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Lettre de D. Barbeau, Irvine, California

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let's Stop Complaining and Start Competing

In their Nov. 11 op-ed "Rigging the Game on Open Skies," American Airlines Chairman Doug Parker and Allied Pilots Association President Keith Wilson whine about the unfairness with which the U.S. government enforces our "open skies" agreements with other countries.



An Emirates Airline passenger jet.

These are some of the people who introduced nonrefundable fares, ticket-change fees, baggage fees and eliminated bereavement fares. Their complaint seems to be that airlines based in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are receiving subsidies from their governments that allow them to offer better service and lower fares on their flights to and from the U.S.

Of course, the open-skies agreements were approved by the U.S. Congress and designed to benefit U.S. citizens. They have worked, and consumers have benefited from the competition provided by foreign airlines. Ask any American frequent flier on which airline he would expect the best service: American, Delta, United or Etihad? In effect, Qatar and the Emirates are spending their money to benefit American consumers.

The foreign planes operating in the U.S. are serviced by employees in the U.S. and the meals they serve on departing flights are prepared by employees in the U.S. Aircraft acquisitions by these airlines create jobs in the U.S.

The U.S. government has been more than kind to the U.S. carriers. American, Delta and United have all benefited from mergers that would not pass muster under traditional antitrust standards. The goal of these mergers was to reduce competition and cut costs—i.e., reduce jobs. We have had a few years' experience to judge the results of the United-Continental merger. Has it resulted in improved service or reliability? It has probably been successful cutting jobs.

PAUL M. HERRON
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Messrs. Parker and Wilson's opinion regarding the Gulf airlines is ridiculous. Living in Florida, I have choices when I fly to the U.A.E. I can connect through Dulles and fly United on an old, beat up, dirty 777-200 with seating from the Dark Ages staffed by a nasty and lazy cabin crew. Or, I can fly nonstop with Emirates from Orlando staffed by a pleasant and help-

ful 777-200 with extra-nice seats. The cost for each is about the same. If American carriers wish to compete on these routes, they need to emulate carriers like Emirates and stop moaning.

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Gulf carriers saw an opportunity and chose to serve new markets in places such as Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata, etc., just to name a few, and started flying there. Why didn't American-flag carriers see this opportunity and capitalize on it? Perhaps they were too busy lobbying and complaining to the government, pursuing mergers as well as nickel and diming their customers. Now that the Gulf carriers have been innovative and are serving new markets, the U.S.-flag carriers are crying foul. What happened to the good, old American values of innovation, hard work, expanding market share by finding new markets rather than by merger, etc.?

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While lamenting foreign subsidization of national airlines, the authors puzzlingly seem to have forgotten to mention the protectionist policies that the U.S. government institutes to shield domestic airlines from foreign competition. Current legislation prohibits foreign airline cabotage, that is, carrying passengers and cargo between domestic airports, and forbids majority ownership of domestic airlines by non-American entities. These policies are a classic example of rent-seeking, using the power of the state to concentrate benefits to the politically organized and dispersing costs to the politically unorganized. Consumers pay the costs of these protectionist policies in the form of higher ticket prices caused by the state-imposed dearth of international airline competition on domestic routes. While the rent-seeking domestic airline cartel reaps the benefits,

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Alors qu'ils se lamentent des subsides versés par les gouvernements aux lignes aériennes nationales ailleurs, les auteurs, étonnamment, semblent avoir oublié de mentionner les politiques protectionnistes mises en place par le gouvernement américain pour protéger les transporteurs aériens domestiques de la concurrence étrangère. La législation actuelle interdit le cabotage des lignes étrangères, c'est-à-dire transporter des passagers et des marchandises entre des aéroports domestiques du pays par des entités non-américaines.

Ces politiques sont un exemple classique de recherche de revenus, en utilisant le pouvoir de l'état pour concentrer les bénéfices vers les populations organisées politiquement et pour diffuser les coûts vers les populations politiquement désorganisées.

Le consommateur paie le coût des politiques protectionnistes du gouvernement sous la forme de tarifs aériens plus élevés causés par une pénurie de concurrence sur les routes domestiques pendant que le cartel des transporteurs aériens domestiques, à la recherche de revenus, engrange les bénéfices.

Traduction libre : Pierre Breton