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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4209

April 12, 2017

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(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

I am deeply concerned about the recent incident in which a passenger on United Airlines flight 3411 from Chicago to Louisville on April 9, 2017 was physically dragged off a plane, and injured in the process, after he refused to volunteer to be bumped from the flight.

I find it hard to believe that there was no way to resolve this situation without resorting to physical force.

The incident raises serious questions to which the flying public deserves answers, and I request that the FAA investigate.

In the meantime, I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

How is it that United Airlines boarded passengers onto the plane and did not realize until afterwards that they needed to bump passengers to make room for their crew? Isn't that information the airline should have known before boarding?

If the amount of compensation United Airlines offered to passengers to encourage them to give up their seats did not yield the number of seats the airline was seeking, why didn't they increase their offer?

Who was responsible for the decision to have a passenger physically removed instead of offering increased compensation to identify another passenger to give up a seat voluntarily?

What alternatives did United Airlines consider before resorting to physical removal? Did they offer to have the passenger placed on a later flight? Did they offer to have the passenger transported to Louisville by car?

What is United Airlines' process for selecting passengers to be involuntarily bumped? If it is a computer algorithm, what factors are included in that algorithm?

Thank you for your prompt attention.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S".

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress