

Common Ground In the Sky

The view from the cockpit makes it quick work to find powerful examples of the common ground we share as citizens of our country. Whether it's the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, or Banff Lake Louise, these icons of the natural world—literally, ground we commonly share—bring out our



sense of patriotism and are recognized the world over as symbols of a nation.

On April 1, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Etihad Airways, landed for the first time at Washington Dulles International Airport. The aircraft was owned by an airline that is supported by what the Dubai Aviation City Corporation's Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum describes as "a

liberal regulatory climate, a tax-free business environment, a customer-centric focus that provides value for money, and close coordination and collaboration within the sector." One week later, the airline announced record passenger and cargo results for the first quarter of 2013. Maintaining its preference for nontransparency, the announcement came with few financial details.

To be fair, many U.S. airlines also had airplanes on the ground and in the skies over Dulles on April 1. The difference? The U.S. government views and works with the aviation industry very differently than its UAE counterpart. Too often, U.S. lawmakers fail to shape the vision for or demonstrate the commitment to the U.S. airline industry that Al Maktoum describes as taking place in the UAE.

As I recently wrote on the *National Journal* blog, the list of U.S. government actions that stand to harm, rather than help, the U.S. airline industry is disturbingly long. The administration's fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget again proposes adding new taxes to the U.S. airlines' existing tax burden, and it calls for increasing taxes that are already in place.

Equally troubling is that many U.S. government activities are actually helping U.S. airlines' competitors. For instance, it looks like Etihad Airways will benefit from a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) preclearance facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport. No U.S. airline serves the airport, but the administration seems eager to establish a CPB preclearance facility in the interest of "national security." What does this mean for the U.S. airline industry? Sound aviation policy is traded away for something else—in this case, providing Etihad the ability to offer its passengers the convenience of clearing U.S. Customs while still in the UAE and gaining a competitive advantage over U.S. airlines. But this fight is not over yet. To leave no doubt that this misguided action should be stopped, join ALPA's Call to Action opposing the CBP facility in Abu Dhabi. Also, sign the petition at drawthelinehere.com.

Similarly, last year, the Export-Import Bank of the United States approved more than \$11 billion in financing to support the export of 154 U.S.-manufactured airliners to 22 airlines in 21 countries. ALPA supports the Ex-Im Bank's work to promote the export of U.S. goods and services to international markets. However, absent necessary reforms to enhance transparency

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and ensure that its decisions don't harm a U.S. industry and its employees, the bank continues to aid U.S. airlines' competitors by providing financing at below-market rates not available to U.S. companies. In 2012, Etihad received more than \$600 million in Ex-Im Bank financing guarantees to help the state-backed foreign airline purchase new aircraft.

At the same time that UAE airlines are receiving this assistance from the U.S. government, Dubai International Airport is prospering—the result of the UAE's enormous infrastructure investment and pro-aviation environment. Dubai International's passenger numbers continue to climb: more than 5 million customers went through the facility in February, a jump of more than 11 percent over 2012.

With this competition facing the U.S. airline industry, what will it take to convince the U.S. government to take the cue from foreign governments like the UAE and bring all of its power to bear in fostering a competitive U.S. airline industry?

The answer lies in making the most of the common ground we share with all who are invested in the U.S. airline industry and working together to execute an unprecedented press for pro-aviation federal policy. You'll see in these pages how ALPA is working to narrow differences and define shared principles with all who influence our industry to level the playing field for the U.S. We have established common ground with the business community through organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. And you'll read how our union uses ALPA-PAC to cultivate common ground with lawmakers of all parties based on a pilot partisan agenda.

ALPA's work to build a safe, strong, and profitable U.S. airline industry offers limitless opportunity to land on common ground with others who have the power to influence the outcome. After all, it's the common ground between us—not the differences—that will define our industry's future success.



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