



April 16, 2013

Dear [Member of Congress]:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) soon plans to enter into a reimbursement agreement with the government of the United Arab Emirates to provide preclearance U.S. national security services at Abu Dhabi International Airport. Such an agreement would set a dangerous and unauthorized precedent which will negatively impact our customers, our employees, the U.S. economy and the global competitiveness of the U.S. airline industry. As such, we ask that you join Congressmen Meehan (R-PA) and DeFazio (D-OR) in asking that DHS not enter into such an agreement.

A pay-to-play construct, like the reimbursement agreement with Abu Dhabi contemplated by DHS, creates an incentive for DHS to shift its sources of funding to foreign governments or other inappropriate entities. Domestic Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities are partially funded by the airlines, airports and their passengers entering the United States. The Abu Dhabi agreement will shift the resource allocation dynamic to reward deep pockets while entry points with the greatest travel demand and need for staff continue to suffer. CBP has been working for two years to create a staffing model that demonstrates which ports of entry have the highest traffic levels and thus merit additional staffing. Our government resources, in this case, America's CBP officers, should not be for sale to the highest bidder.

DHS should focus on fixing America's airport staffing first, before providing this benefit at foreign airports that are not served by U.S. carriers. Congress addressed the issue of CBP staffing in the recently signed Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013 by authorizing a very limited reimbursement pilot program to be available only at five domestic ports for a limited period of time. While DHS has been seeking Congressional approval for authority to enter into a preclearance agreement with "any entity" to provide cover for this agreement with the UAE, Congress denied DHS that broader authority because support for this proposed new practice does not exist. DHS has decided to ignore Congressional direction and move forward with this agreement despite the lack of Congressional support.

At a time when U.S. carriers and airports are fighting to maintain our global competitiveness, the U.S. government should not be signing a deal with the UAE that benefits a foreign emirate and its wholly-owned national carrier. This deal clearly puts U.S. airlines and their employees at a competitive disadvantage, and it will only get worse. According to DHS officials, plans exist to open several more preclearance facilities in the Middle East shortly after the planned opening of Abu Dhabi. Such actions would directly support the strategy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to make their emirates global hubs of commerce, travel and tourism. By providing these preclearance services in these locations, the United States will support the UAE at the expense of U.S. airports, airlines and jobs.

The Middle East governments and their sovereignly owned carriers (Emirates, Etihad and Qatar) have

399 wide body aircraft on order, which is twice what the combined U.S. passenger carriers have ordered. The relatively small populations of these countries do not support this kind of growth. However, if this ill-conceived plan moves forward these carriers will be able to market "preclearance" into the United States to further their goal of becoming the world's leading airlines and siphon off passengers who would otherwise fly on U.S. carriers. The ability of U.S. carriers to compete on a level playing field for these international markets is critical. Our higher yields on international traffic is what enables us to provide service to less profitable small- and medium-size communities that so many members of Congress want served. Etihad will not be providing service to rural America.

And yet, with this facility, our own government is effectively picking winners and losers in the global market. Even more objectionable is the U.S. plan to foot the bill for these services. DHS officials admit that taxpayers will fund 20 percent of the construction and continued operation of these facilities. This diversion of taxpayer dollars to assist wealthy foreign airlines cannot be justified, especially in a budget environment in which U.S. airports have been understaffed for years, causing our passengers to wait in three- and four-hour customs lines. DHS must first provide adequate services/staffing at US airports, before establishing facilities overseas.

We therefore ask that you voice opposition to DHS efforts to open facilities in foreign countries and instead continue to work collaboratively with the U.S. airline, airport and travel and tourism industries to resolve lengthy wait times at U.S. airports.

We are committed to continuing to work with Congress and the Administration to address these critical issues.

Respectfully yours,

Airlines for America
Air Line Pilots Association
Airports Council International – North America
Association of Flight Attendants - CWA
Consumer Travel Alliance
Global Business Travel Association
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers
International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO
Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO
Regional Airline Association