

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 6, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Chao:

Floridians – and Americans throughout the Southeast – are busy preparing themselves for the arrival of Hurricane Irma, a powerful storm already causing catastrophe throughout the Caribbean. Many in the Southeast are seeking to temporarily evacuate the region, with some searching for flights that will take them away from the impending storm. As a result, one airline has announced it is capping fares from airports in Florida to locations north, which is commendable. But a number of troubling reports, however, have surfaced that detail exorbitantly high airfares on a number of airlines. One report describes a ticket from Miami to Hartford, Connecticut that increased nearly tenfold from Monday to Tuesday, going from \$159 to \$1,020 over the course of one day. Another report details \$3,000 fares for basic tickets from Miami to the New York City area. These are just a few examples. We demand that the Department of Transportation (DOT) investigate this situation, including looking at the price of flights from Caribbean islands, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, to the mainland U.S. in recent days. Price gouging practices can take root during emergencies, so we further urge you to keep a close and watchful eye on airlines over the coming week to ensure airlines are not trying to make a dime off disaster.

Airlines certainly have a right to a reasonable return for services rendered and vagaries in pricing are to be expected; but airlines have no right to impose exorbitant, unfair prices on Americans simply trying to get out of harm's way. It would certainly be offensive if airlines – who rely on publicly supported infrastructure and have been bolstered by American taxpayers for nearly a century – used this opportunity to impose unconscionable costs on consumers. The DOT is uniquely empowered to investigate and act upon claims of anti-consumer conduct. Neither states nor individuals have this power. As many federal officials work relentlessly to protect Americans from the kinds of harm Hurricane Irma may bring, it is imperative DOT use all resources at its disposal to protect consumers from the harm that comes from outrageous and oppressive fares.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and efforts to protect consumers.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senate