

A line of Spirit Airlines jets sit on the tarmac at Orlando International Airport on May 20, 2020, in Orlando, Fla. Frontier Airlines on June 24, 2022, added more cash and a larger breakup fee to its offer to buy Spirit Airlines, and the Spirit board repeated its preference for Frontier over a rival bid by Jet-Blue Airways. (AP)



airline merger: Frontier sweetens offer for Spirit Airlines

Frontier Airlines on Friday added more cash and a larger breakup fee to its offer to buy Spirit Airlines, and the Spirit board repeated its preference for Frontier over a rival bid by JetBlue Airways. Frontier added \$2 per share to its previous offer, boosting it to \$4.13 in cash plus 1.9126 shares of Frontier for each Spirit share. The Denver-based airline also raised the amount it would pay Miramar, Florida-based Spirit if antitrust regulators stop the deal — from \$250 million to \$350 million —

matching JetBlue's proposed breakup fee. Spirit said that, given the sweetened terms, its board reiterated its unanimous recommendation that shareholders approve the Frontier offer at a special meeting next Thursday. JetBlue said its proposal remains better than Frontier's with a higher value, more cash, "more certainty, and more regulatory protections." Frontier's move was the latest gambit in a fight between Frontier and JetBlue to see who gets the nation's largest discount

airline. On Monday, New York-based Jet-Blue raised its all-cash offer to \$33.50 per share, or more than \$3.6 billion. At current value, JetBlue's proposal is worth more. JetBlue proposes to buy all Spirit shares and reconfigure the budget airline's planes into JetBlue's less-cramped layout. Frontier's stock-and-cash offer would give Spirit shareholders 48.5% of the new, combined airline — which does not yet have a name. That means investors willing to hold the stock could come out ahead if the shares rise enough in price. (AP)

United cuts flights at Newark in effort to reduce delays

Airlines shift blame for flight problems to FAA

DALLAS, June 25, (AP): Airlines under scrutiny for widespread flight disruptions are renewing their criticism of the government agency that manages the nation's airspace, saying that understaffing at the Federal Aviation Administration is "crippling" traffic along the East Coast.

Airlines for America, which represents the largest US carriers, said Friday it wants to know FAA's staffing plans for the July Fourth holiday weekend, "so we can plan accordingly."

The comments from the industry group could serve as a pre-emptive defense in case airlines again suffer thousands of canceled and delayed flights over the holiday weekend, when travel is expected to set new pandemic-era highs.

"The industry is actively and nimbly doing everything possible to create a positive customer experience since it is in an airline's inherent interest to keep customers happy, so they return for future business," Nicholas Calio, president of the trade group, said in a letter to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

Calio said airlines have dropped 15% of the flights they originally planned for June through August to make the remaining flights more reliable, they are hiring and training more pilots and customer-service agents, and giving passengers more flexibility to change travel plans.

Calio said air traffic is often disrupted "for many hours" because bad weather causes the the FAA to issue delays.

Expectations

"However, we have also observed that FAA (air traffic control) staffing challenges have led to traffic restrictions under blue sky conditions," he added.

The FAA shot back, with a reference to taxpayer money that airlines received after the pandemic devastated air travel.

"People expect when they buy an airline ticket that they'll get where they need to go safely, efficiently, reliably and affordably," the FAA said in a statement. "After receiving \$54 billion in pandemic relief to help save the airlines from mass layoffs and bankruptcy, the American people deserve to have their expectations met."

The FAA said it has added controllers in high-traffic areas and added alternate routes to keep planes moving.

The airline trade group chief's comments came a week after Buttigieg called airline leaders to a virtual meeting and threatened to punish carriers that fail to meet consumer-protection standards set by his department, which includes the FAA.



United Airlines planes are parked at gates at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, N.J., on July 1, 2020. United Airlines will cut about 50 flights a day in Newark, to try to limit flight delays and cancellations there this summer. (AP)

Deal will help both union and airline

Pilots in line for big raises amid travel disruptions

DALLAS, June 25, (AP): The largest pilots union has approved a contract that would boost the pay of pilots at United Airlines by more than 14% over the next 18 months, potentially clearing the way for similar wage hikes throughout the industry.

The deal reflects the leverage currently held by unions, with the industry facing a pilot shortage that has resulted in cancellations worldwide and fewer flights.

The Air Line Pilots Association said Friday that the council overseeing relations with United approved a tentative two-year agreement that covers about 14,000 of the airline's pilots.

Buttigieg said he called the meeting after being alarmed by the high number of canceled flights around Memorial Day — more than 2,700 in a five-day stretch, according to tracking service FlightAware.

Thunderstorms can quickly snarl air traffic during the summer, but airlines have also acknowledged staffing shortages — they are hiring at a rapid pace to replace tens of thousands of workers whom the airlines paid to quit when travel collapsed in 2020. Pilot union leaders say their groups

The contract would need to be ratified by rank-and-file pilots to take effect. Voting will run through July 15.

United CEO Scott Kirby called the deal an industry-leading contract that would help both the union and the airline.

United, based in Chicago, is the first major US airline to reach an agreement with its pilots since negotiations across the industry were put on hold because of the pandemic. Union groups at other big airlines have been watching the United contract talks closely as a potential guide in their own negotiations.

Federal law creates a long and difficult process before air-

line workers can legally go on strike, but pilots at the big airlines have picketed airports and other locations to pressure management into bigger pay hikes. Pilots have complained that thinly staffed airlines are asking them to work too many flights, with more pilots reporting fatigue.

The United contract, which the union valued at \$1.3 billion over two years, would be retroactive to the start of 2022 and give three pay raises totaling more than 14.5% through the end of next year. The union said it includes better overtime and premium pay, a new retirement plan, a new 8-week paid maternity leave benefit and improved scheduling provisions.

are being stretched to the limit, and more pilots report being fatigued.

Also:

NEW YORK: United Airlines will cut about 50 flights a day out of Newark, New Jersey, to reduce long delays that the airline blames on airport construction and other issues.

The cuts — about 12% of United flights in Newark — will start July 1 and last the rest of the summer. United is the

dominant airline at Newark Liberty International Airport, which is just across the Hudson River from New York City and gets heavy use from people living in and around the city.

United's chief operations officer, **Jon Roitman**, told employees that the airline has enough planes, pilots and other workers to run its Newark schedule, but cutting flights "should help minimize excessive delays and improve on-time performance."

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