

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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DOCKET SECTION

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U.S. Department of Transportation
Room PL-41, Docket OST-98-3713 - 23
400 7th St. SW
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Protection of Budget Airlines

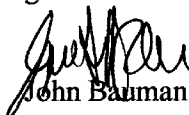
The arrogance of major air carriers, both U.S. and international, has become legendary. Ethically, they have all the predatory instincts of Saddam Hussien -- and a track record to match.

Yes, I strongly support a measure of protection for the budget airlines who honestly want to compete on a basis of service, price, safety and *value*. That, perhaps, is the only hope of protection the air-traveling public has against the monopolistic character of an industry whose major carriers have but one frontal and one fall-back position: destroy all competition and, failing that, buy it or merge it.

My support for protection is with caution, however, and the certainty that no protective measure can succeed in the absence of judgment and wisdom. Determining what constitutes predatory pricing by the majors as action to drive competitors out of business is not a cream puff task. I broadly disagree with the politics of Consumer Reports. But as Ed Perkins of CR Travel Letter notes, perhaps DOT's test will be akin to a community's view of pornography -- they'll know it when they see it. That, I think I can agree with.

I most strongly support an environment in which businesses both large and small have an opportunity to compete ethically, without the threat of annihilation, and that they be allowed to fail or thrive on their own merits -- not at the pleasure of competitors. DOT has a challenge before it. But on balance, I have to believe that the measures under your consideration must have some merit. After all, if the Nader group opposes your initiative, it almost has to be a good idea. Especially when considered in the context of Paul Hudson's statement that it's "... the government saying they're going to eliminate fare wars" when it appears the exact *opposite* is the case.

I'm no fan of government regulation. But after 20 years of airline deregulation and watching an industry devolve from providing conscientious service to peddling anathema, there just may be times when brandishing a mailed fist is the only thing that gets the attention of a recalcitrant giant.


John Bauman