

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2026

Scott Kirby  
CEO  
United Airlines Holding Inc.  
233 S. Wacker Drive  
Chicago, IL 60606

Robert Isom  
CEO  
American Airlines Group Inc.  
1 Skyview Drive  
Fort Worth, TX 76155

Dear Mr. Kirby and Mr. Isom:

We write with concerns regarding recent reports indicating that Mr. Kirby “floated a possible combination [of United Airlines] with American Airlines.”<sup>1</sup> A merger between United Airlines and American Airlines would create the largest airline in the world,<sup>2</sup> in an industry already plagued by a lack of competition. In September 2025, the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights held a hearing to examine the historic consolidation in the airline industry, which has led to increased prices and reduced services for fliers.<sup>3</sup> We are concerned that a merger between United and American would exacerbate these trends. We are seeking information on whether United Airlines and American Airlines have discussed any merger plans, and how this potential deal would affect consumers.

A merger between United and American would combine two of the “Big Four” U.S. airlines into an “industry behemoth,”<sup>4</sup> controlling nearly half of the U.S. market share of the airline industry<sup>5</sup> and creating the largest airline on the planet by revenue. Last year, United and American were the world’s two largest airlines by available capacity.<sup>6</sup> The combined entity would own more than 2,800 aircraft – more than double the fleet size of the next-largest air carrier – and be able to service 405 million passengers – far more than any other air carrier in the world.<sup>7</sup> A combined

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, “United CEO Pitched Trump on Possible Tie-Up With Rival American,” Siddharth Philip, Allyson Versprille, and Sri Taylor, April 13, 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-13/united-ceo-has-pitched-possible-combination-with-rival-american>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights, “Examining Competition in America’s Skies,” September 30, 2025, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/committee-activity/hearings/examining-competition-in-americas-skies>.

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, “United’s merger pitch for American Airlines draws swift antitrust skepticism,” Shivansh Tiwary, Jody Godoy, and Rajesh Kumar Singh, April 14, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/united-american-airlines-climb-after-news-kirby-floating-merger-with-trump-2026-04-14/>.

<sup>5</sup> CBS News, “United CEO floated idea of United-American Airlines merger, sources say,” Kris Van Cleave, April 14, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/united-ceo-floats-idea-united-american-airlines-merger-sources/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, “United Airlines CEO reportedly pitched merger with American, sparking competition fears,” Lauren Aratani and Michael Sainato, April 14, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/apr/14/united-airlines-merger-american-airlines>.

<sup>7</sup> Bloomberg, “United CEO Pitched Trump on Possible Tie-Up With Rival American,” Siddharth Philip, Allyson Versprille, and Sri Taylor, April 13, 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-04-13/united-ceo-has-pitched-possible-combination-with-rival-american>.

United-American air carrier would be able to exploit its market power to harm consumers in a number of ways.

First, a United-American merger could lead to increased prices for consumers, at a time when airlines are already squeezing flyers through higher fares and fees.<sup>8</sup> Flight costs are already “near all-time highs,” outpacing the rate of inflation.<sup>9</sup> United and American have both recently hiked prices for checked bags.<sup>10</sup> Decreased competition between airlines leads to higher ticket prices and ancillary fees.<sup>11</sup> If United and American were to merge, airlines would face less pressure from rivals to keep the cost of flying down, and airlines across the industry could raise ticket prices and fees even higher. Indeed, previous airline mergers have empowered airlines to hike consumer prices. In his role as then-President of US Airways (which merged with American in 2013), Mr. Kirby noted “[t]hree successful fare increases – [the company was] able to pass along to customers because of consolidation.”<sup>12</sup> Mr. Kirby has also said, “Consolidation has ... allowed the industry to do things like ancillary revenues.... That is a structural permanent change to the industry and one that’s impossible to overstate the benefit from.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition, a combination of United and American could likely cut routes, particularly those served out of two major airports, Dallas Fort Worth International Airport and Chicago O’Hare International Airport.<sup>14</sup> A merger would create a hub overlap at O’Hare – where the two airlines currently compete for business – and expand United Airlines’ access to Dallas Fort Worth, which is not currently a United hub.<sup>15</sup> A combined United-American airline would potentially no longer find it profitable to service all of United’s and American’s routes and drop certain routes, reducing options for consumers.

Furthermore, a United-American merger would hurt smaller airlines’ ability to compete for critical gate access. Mr. Kirby has made United’s intentions clear with respect to gates at O’Hare, where United and American currently compete. In 2017, Mr. Kirby said, “[I]f people want to talk about our long-term plan for Chicago, it’s to grow it incredibly, and I hope to

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<sup>8</sup> New York Times, “Think Airfares Are High? Brace Yourself for Bag Fees and Fuel Surcharges.” Christine Chung, April 7, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/07/travel/airfare-bag-fees-fuel-surcharges.html>.

<sup>9</sup> CNBC, “Airline ticket prices are up 25%, outpacing inflation — here are the ways you can still save,” Brett Holzhauer, June 24, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/select/airline-ticket-prices-are-up-25-percent-why-and-how-to-save/>.

<sup>10</sup> CNBC, “American Airlines makes bag fees even more expensive for basic economy tickets,” Michele Luhn, April 9, 2026, <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/04/09/american-airlines-bag-fees-basic-economy.html>.

<sup>11</sup> WVTM 13, “Major US airlines make billions off junk fees, Senate finds,” Damali Ramirez, March 11, 2025, <https://www.wvtm13.com/article/airline-fees-unbundling-impact/63171738>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, “Justice Department Files Antitrust Lawsuit Challenging Proposed Merger Between US Airways and American Airlines,” press release, August 13, 2013, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-files-antitrust-lawsuit-challenging-proposed-merger-between-us-airways-and>.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Newsweek, “United-American Airlines Merger Could Make Flying Worse. Here’s How,” Jordan King, April 14, 2026, <https://www.newsweek.com/united-american-airlines-merger-could-make-flying-worse-heres-how-11827821>.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*; United Airlines, “United’s hub information and fact sheet page,” <https://www.united.com/en/us/newsroom/hub-airports.html>.

someday take over those gates that currently have AA on them.”<sup>16</sup> And earlier this year, Mr. Kirby said, “[W]e’re drawing a line in the sand. We are not going to allow them [AA] to win a single gate at our expense.”<sup>17</sup> Low-cost carriers are already struggling to compete in the face of United’s tactics at O’Hare, with Spirit concerned that the turf war will squeeze out low-cost carriers<sup>18</sup> and Southwest announcing it will discontinue service entirely.<sup>19</sup> A combined United-American airline would be the largest airline in the world, and could exploit its outsized market power to shut out smaller competitors, including by preventing them from accessing airport facilities.

A potential merger would also raise concerns regarding monopsony power and job loss at the combined airline.<sup>20</sup> Significant consolidation suppresses wages and compensation across the industry by reducing the number of competing employers bidding for workers.<sup>21</sup> A United-American merger would enable the massive combined carrier to exercise monopsony power over airline workers, potentially suppressing wages and benefits industry-wide.

Any proposed merger between United Airlines and American Airlines raises serious questions under antitrust law and raises the likelihood of harm for Americans consumers. To further understand United’s and American’s intentions, and how a merger would affect consumers, we ask that you answer the following questions by May 3, 2026:

1. Have you or other company officials discussed a merger between your airlines?
  - a. If so, what was the nature of these discussions?
  - b. Do you currently have any plans to seek board or shareholder approval for a merger?
2. Under federal law, DOT must determine that an airline merger is “consistent with the public interest” before approving the transfer of route certificates.<sup>22</sup> How would a merger between United Airlines and American Airlines be consistent with the public interest?
3. Would a merger between United and American lead to higher fares?
  - a. Please share any analyses that indicate how a merger between United and American would affect fares for fliers.

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<sup>16</sup> Skift, “Chicago Is Becoming the Center of the Growing Conflict Between United and American,” Brian Sumers, February 15, 2017, <https://skift.com/2017/02/15/chicago-is-becoming-the-center-of-the-growing-conflict-between-united-and-american/>.

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, “United draws ‘line in the sand’ in escalating Chicago O’Hare fight with American Airlines,” Rajesh Kumar Singh, January 1, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/united-draws-line-sand-escalating-chicago-ohare-fight-with-american-airlines-2026-01-21/>.

<sup>18</sup> Aviation Week, “Spirit Airlines Points FAA To American And United For Chicago Cuts,” Christine Boynton, March 9, 2026, <https://aviationweek.com/air-transport/airlines-lessors/spirit-airlines-points-faa-american-united-chicago-cuts>.

<sup>19</sup> WTTW, “Southwest Airlines to Discontinue Service at O’Hare Airport in June,” Eunice Alpasan, March 13, 2026, <https://news.wttw.com/2026/03/13/southwest-airlines-discontinue-service-o-hare-airport-june>.


<sup>20</sup> USA Today, “United-American airline merger idea sparks antitrust and fare worries,” Shivansh Tiwary and Jody Godoy, April 14, 2026, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2026/04/14/united-airlines-american-airlines-merger/89605706007/>.


<sup>21</sup> *United States v. Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA*, 646 F. Supp. 3d 1 (D.D.C. 2022) (The proposed \$2.18 billion merger between Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster was blocked, finding that the combined entity would exercise monopsony power over authors of anticipated top-selling books, leading to lower advances and suppressed compensation.).

<sup>22</sup> 49 U.S.C. 41105.

4. Would a merger between United and American lead to higher ancillary fees?
  - a. Please share any analyses that indicate how a merger between United and American would affect fees for fliers.
5. Would a merger between United and American lead to job losses at the airlines?
  - a. Please share any analyses that indicate how a merger between United and American would affect workers.
6. Would a merger between United and American lead to the elimination of routes?
  - a. Please share any analyses that indicate how a merger between United and American would affect routes.

Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

  
Mike Lee  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Antitrust,  
Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights  
United States Senate Committee on the  
Judiciary