

Buying seats by the pound

Set standards needed in charging passengers for more than one seat on airplanes



FRANK CHANCE • THE BATTALION

Southwest Airlines has recently been criticized for its policy requiring larger passengers to pay for two seats. The requirement, which has been in place since 1980, received recent attention when Southwest began training its employees for a new ticketing and boarding process.



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Many other airlines, including Continental and Northwest, have the same policy. In addition, Southwest Airlines provides people forced to buy two seats a refund for one of the seats if the flight does not sell out.

While the rule may seem harsh to some, it is based on sound principles. Every airline attempts to fill as many seats as possible on each flight. If a person takes up so much room that the seat next to him or her cannot be occupied, it is reasonable to expect the offending person to compensate the airline for the loss of revenue.

"We sell seats, and if you consume more than one seat you have to buy more than one seat," said Southwest Airlines spokeswoman Beth Harbin in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

Critics claim the Southwest Airlines policy discriminates against obese people. However, the policy applies to all people who are too large to fit in one seat, not just the obese, said another Southwest Airlines spokeswoman, Christine Turneabe-Connelly, in an interview with *The Washington Times*. For example, a very tall person would be expected to buy an extra seat if he or she could not reasonably fit in one seat.

As long as the policy is equally enforced, it does not discriminate against the obese. However, ticket agents are not currently given weight and height requirements to help them decide if a person needs two seats. Instead, ticket agents are trained to make these decisions case-by-case.

"It is, unfortunately, a judgment call," Turneabe-Connelly said. Personal judgment has no place in a situation as potentially volatile and hurtful as the one in question. Southwest Airlines needs one clear standard that is equally enforced on all of its flights. Airline officials should determine the maximum girth and height at which a person can fit into one seat, and ticket agents should make determinations by this information alone.

Seat requirements should be made readily available to customers before they approach the ticket counter. Customers should also be made aware of all stipulations when buying their tickets online or over the phone to avoid problems like last-minute purchases of extra seats.

The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) advises obese people to familiarize themselves with airline policies before buying tickets. The NAAFA's website says obese passengers should ask about seat sizes, be up-front about their size and request seats that might allow more room when purchasing tickets.

"You have the right to fly anywhere you want to go," the NAAFA website tells its readers.

The NAAFA is correct, but it is not Southwest Airlines' intention to deny anyone the right to air travel. Southwest Airlines provides a service — one seat on an airplane. If a person requires more than one seat, his or her right to fly is not being denied. The person is simply expected to pay for the extra space he or she uses.

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Public should not fear to celebrate Fourth of July

Amid threats of terrorist action on the Fourth of July, many Americans are choosing to celebrate at home. U.S. intelligence reported June 20 it had received a tip concerning attacks planned for



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Independence Day from a man who accidentally intercepted a conversation on his cellular phone. The man understood Arabic and was able to decipher some of what the two men were plotting. The most specific information obtained concerns a potential attack on Las Vegas, Nev., but the alerts do not rule out other locations.

Without a doubt, terrorists see the Fourth of July as a tremendous opportunity to send their anti-American message to all the happy families spending the day celebrating. The holiday represents what terrorists hate about America: freedom. One important thing to remember about terrorists, however, is they get their power not from what they are actually able to do, but from what others fear they are able to do.

While terrorists have proven their ability to catch the entire nation off guard, they do not pose the kind of threat most Americans credit them with. The reality of Sept. 11 is that the attacks only killed one percent of the number of people that were killed by the bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima. Ingenuity, determination and independent funding empowered the hijackers to carry out their massacre, but when put into perspective, their might is little compared to that of the U.S. Department of Defense, which is funded by an entire nation of people and led by the most educated minds. Despite recent attacks on the competence of U.S. intelligence agencies, few would deny that America is the greatest military superpower in the world.

A primary goal of terrorism is to scare members of the American public into their homes and keep them there, sequestered and

afraid of going to shopping malls or openly patriotic celebrations. That is the only feasible way for terrorists to have control over the country. This Fourth of July should not be celebrated like every other year; it should be even bigger.

Most A&M students have memories of hamburgers and fireworks from years past, but this year the younger generation learned how precious freedom really is. This year, the Fourth of July should be different. Even for those who do not wish to risk being involved in an attack, they can share a fresh feeling of brotherhood and solidarity with others. Anti-American terrorists will ultimately win if they can scare the country into submission. What a sad display of irony it would be if Independence Day passed without celebrations of Americans standing side-by-side, sharing the one thing they all have in common. A mind plagued by fear is not free.

Time magazine recently ran a story full of pictures of the new Afghanistan. Free from the oppressive rule of the Taliban, people now play music and dance in the streets, conduct non-Muslim worship in the open, and women show their faces. These might not seem like extreme acts to most Americans, but under the rule of the Taliban, participants were subject to public execution for engaging in them.

Although the people of Afghanistan are in much more danger of daily terrorist retaliation than Americans, they are so intoxicated with their newfound liberties that they live boldly. They refuse to be held back by fear, and defy opposition. America should use them as a model for appreciating freedoms so easily taken for granted this Fourth of July.

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Renovations on campus inconvenient for students

As the first summer session draws to a close, students are frustrated not only with finals, but with campus renovations as well. Although summer may have fewer enrolled students, many still rely on campus facilities and equipment. Texas A&M should reconsider its summer campus renovation plans in the future because of the multitude of problems it causes for students.



ANDI BACA

Despite its heavy traffic, the computer lab in the Blocker building is closed for the summer. This is an inconvenience for students because the next closest computer lab is the Student Computing Center (SCC). Many students have summer classes in Blocker and use the computer lab to finish last-minute homework assignments or check their email between classes. When current students try to use the SCC during the summer, they must compete with the crowd of new freshmen attending New Student Conferences. This summer, the SCC has reserved many computers specifically for the New Student Conferences, limiting the number of computers current students can use. For most students, waiting for a computer is as frustrating as waiting for a parking spot.

Northside residents and other students dining on campus are also at a disadvantage this summer. After Sbisa Dining Hall was closed for total renovation two years ago, students did not expect it to be closed again so soon. Nonetheless, the dining hall has been closed throughout the summer, forcing students to seek other places for meals and limiting the variation of dining choices. It forces students to travel to the opposite end of campus to eat if they do not want to eat in the Underground. Students paying for a meal plan are getting less-variety for their money.

Road construction has also been a problem, limiting campus travel for several semesters. However, it seems that more roads are closed now than ever before.

People trying to access the campus from Texas Avenue have been out of luck this summer.

According to Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS), New Main is under construction to enhance the entrance

to campus.

Among others, Joe Routt and Bizzell Street continue to be closed, forcing drivers to find new routes to campus. Koldus Parking Garage has closed its main entrance, forcing guests and workers to enter on the opposite side of the garage. During peak hours, the entrance and exit lines to the garage have commuters waiting much longer than before.

During the summer months, A&M hosts many competitions, clinics and student orientation programs. Excessive construction causes confusion and frustration for visitors who are not familiar with campus. Although its purpose is to beautify and improve campus, the construction makes campus an unattractive hazard for students and guests. Because of excessive construction, students walking on campus must dodge heavy machinery, barricades and construction workers on their way to class.

It is understandable that a campus that supports as many students and activities as A&M will need repairs and additions. Many of the roads around campus are narrow, uneven and filled with potholes, and are in definite need of attention. The Blocker Computer Lab is also in need of renovation and expansion. However, by attempting to complete all these projects at the same time, administrators are ignoring the inconvenience they cause students. Large projects affecting the day-to-day life of most of the student body should be planned in a compromise between what is good for this school and for its students. Students should always be considered, as they are paying to get an education.

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