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DOT Reviewing ‘Onerous’ Regulations

WASHINGTON—Praising U.S. airlines for product innovation, strong balance sheets and wise capacity discipline, a top Department of Transportation (DOT) official said the government is inclined to stay out of the industry’s way and let the market play out.

“The lesson for us in Washington [from U.S. airlines’ recent financial success and the emergence of ultra-LCCs] is to remove onerous regulatory burdens,” DOT undersecretary for policy Derek Kan told an International Aviation Club (IAC) luncheon here March 2. Noting the variety of airline business models in the U.S. and the product investments being made by a number of carriers, Kan said: “We want to be a part of that.”

He said the management strategies that led to numerous airline bankruptcies appear to be a thing of the past. “Airlines are no longer simply chasing market share,” he said.

Kan said DOT takes a “vigorous systematic approach” to reviewing regulations on all transportation sectors, and has found that a number of regulations or proposed regulations “do not seem to have a cost-benefit” rationale. Emphasizing that regulations “critical for safety” will “remain untouched,” Kan encouraged airline representatives in the IAC luncheon audience to communicate with DOT regarding unnecessary regulations. “Please flag for us regulations that you think need to be looked at,” he said.

In December 2017, DOT withdrew two proposed rules that would have forced U.S.

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Airlines

Delta Air Lines CEO Bastian Defends NRA Discount Removal

Delta Air Lines CEO Ed Bastian defended the Atlanta-based airline’s recent removal of a group discount for National Rifle Association (NRA) members, telling Delta employees in a March 2 memo that “our decision was not made for economic gain and our values are not for sale.”

Bastian released the memo a day after the Georgia state legislature passed a tax bill in which a fuel tax exemption for Delta—which reportedly would have saved the carrier approximately $40 million per year—had been excised from the legislation by pro-NRA Georgia lawmakers as a protest against the state’s largest private employer.

The controversy relates to political activism in the U.S. following a February mass shooting at a Florida high school in which 17 people were killed. A number of U.S. companies have rescinded discounts previously offered to NRA members.

On Feb. 24, Delta rescinded a one-time group travel discount for the NRAs annual meeting, and asked the NRA to remove the Delta name and logo from the NRA’s website. United Airlines alerted the NRA on Feb. 24 that the airline would no longer offer a discounted rate to the NRA annual meeting and, like Delta, asked to have United’s

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airlines to collect and publish detailed data on ancillary revenue and disclose baggage fees to passengers at point-of-sale.

Speaking a day earlier at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Aviation Summit, Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly said U.S. airlines are operating in a more reasonable regulatory environment than in the past. He said the tax bill passed late last year by Congress and signed by President Donald Trump, which lowered the corporate tax rate to 21%, was “a great down payment on a more favorable business environment.”

Kelly said airline ticket taxes remain too high, but added that the overall regulatory environment is improving. “We still have an excessive aviation tax burden, but we’re beginning to move in the right direction,” he said. “I think it’s a move favorable business environment right now and certainly tax reform is a big part of that … I don’t think anyone wants the government meddling in how we do business.”

—Aaron Karp, aaron.karp@informa.com

BASTIAN, from p. 1

information removed from the NRA website. American Airlines has noted that it never offered any discount to NRA members. Other U.S. airlines to-date have been publicly silent on the matter.

Bastian explained that Delta’s “decision followed the NRAs controversial statements after the recent school shootings in Florida,” adding: “Our discounted travel benefit for NRA members could be seen as Delta implicitly endorsing the NRA. That is not the case.”

After the Delta decision was announced, disagreeing Georgia lawmakers, including the state’s lieutenant governor, zeroed in on the fuel tax exemption element of the state’s imminent tax legislation.

“While Delta’s intent was to remain neutral, some elected officials in Georgia tied our decision to a pending jet fuel tax exemption, threatening to eliminate it unless we reversed course,” Bastian said.

Reviewing Discounts

Bastian conceded the decision created controversy at Delta. “Our people and our customers have a wide range of views on how to increase safety in our schools and public places, and we are not taking sides,” Bastian said. “Our objective in removing any implied affiliation with the NRA was to remove Delta from this debate … we are supporters of the 2nd Amendment, just as we embrace the entire Constitution of the United States.”

Bastian indicated the airline was in the process of a review to end group discounts “for any group of a politically divisive nature.”

As the controversy swirled in Georgia during the week, other U.S. states offered themselves as a possible new Delta home-base, including direct pitches from the governors of Connecticut and Virginia.

Bastian, however, demurred. “None of this changes the fact that our home is in Atlanta and we are proud and honored to locate our headquarters here,” Bastian said. “I have tremendous respect and admiration for [Georgia] Governor Nathan Deal, and thank him for the work he has done on the jet fuel exemption. He is a great friend to Delta. I know this action by the state legislature troubled him as it does all of us.”

Deal signed the tax bill into law March 2.

—Mark Nensel/ATW, mark.nensel@informa.com

AIRLINES

Consultants: Digital Shift Should Drive Revenue Growth

Growth opportunities from the digital transformation of the commercial aviation sector will come from better airport, air traffic and airline operations, as well as through predictive maintenance and better asset tracking, Frost & Sullivan consultants said in a recent report.

“Operations, manufacturing and air traffic management will all be highly influenced by the emergence of a digitized logistics network,” Frost said. “The passenger, pilots and crew as well as staff will also see data-driven services enhance their experiences in air travel.”

Enhanced Analytics

According to the report, “The Global Impact of Digital Transformation in Commercial Aviation, 2017,” the consultants believe nearer-term objectives for commercial aviation businesses will be to develop new revenue streams and enhanced analytics platforms to improve their decision-making. Longer term, interoperability, security, virtual reality and artificial intelligence will become more prominent areas for revenue generation.

The Frost report, distributed widely at the end of February, points to expected revenue opportunities for industry from digitization. Other industry observers have acknowledged the phenomenon is in the early stages. A recent Accenture survey of aerospace executives found that 56% of the companies polled said they are deriving new sources of growth from digitization, while 25% are generating efficiencies. But only 9% said they simultaneously are advancing both operational efficiency and new business growth.

Digitization also brings its own challenges and costs, especially in the cyber arena. “As the aviation industry becomes more connected, we will see greater exchanges of data across multiple stakeholder groups,” said Frost’s senior analyst-airspace Aravind Srinivasanathan. “Increased data sharing, however, will create more vulnerabilities and lead to continued investment in cyber solutions and data protection.”

—Michael Bruno, michael.bruno@aviationweek.com
AIRCRAFT
From Scoot To Swoop: Greenway ULCC President

Calgary-based WestJet named Steven Greenway president of WestJet’s forthcoming ultra-LCC Swoop.

Greenway—formerly CCO for Singapore Airlines’ LCC subsidiary Scoot—takes over the Swoop helm from Bob Cummings, the WestJet executive in charge of Swoop’s launch. Cummings was named WestJet EVP, strategy and guest services. Both Greenway and Cummings will report directly to WestJet CEO Gregg Saretsky.

June Launch

WestJet said Greenway will be responsible “for all strategic aspects of Swoop, including short and long-term planning, branding, pricing, product development and operationalization of the ULCC in 2018 and beyond.”

Swoop is scheduled to launch in June, operating as a stand-alone ULCC on point-to-point domestic Canadian routes with an initial three 189-seat Boeing 737-800s. Saretsky said in February the new ULCC aims to fly to some points outside of Canada by the end of 2018. Swoop’s fleet is planned to grow to six 737-800s by the end of September and 10 by spring 2019.

U.S. Competition

In addition to domestic service, the new airline intends to compete with U.S. ULCCs flying from airports close to the Canadian border. Cummings told investors in December that “Canadians, for a number of years now” have been traveling across the border to fly out of U.S. airports on U.S. ULCCs, such as Allegiant Air flights to Las Vegas out of Bellingham, Washington and Spirit Airlines flights to Fort Lauderdale, Florida out of Buffalo, New York.

Company executives have said the airline’s fleet could eventually grow to 40 aircraft. Swoop tickets went on sale in early February.

—Mark Nensel/ATW, mark.nensel@informa.com

AIRCRAFT
Malaysia Airlines Touts Yield Improvement

Malaysia Airlines Berhad (MAB) managed to increase its passenger yield year-over-year (Y0Y) in the 2017 fourth quarter, although the carrier signaled that its full-year financial performance did not meet targets.

The airline does not report full financial results because it is not publicly traded. However, it highlighted a fourth-quarter yield improvement in both the domestic and international sectors despite intense competition and overcapacity in the Asian region.

This helped raise unit revenue by 2% Y0Y for the quarter, although load factor slipped by four percentage points to 77%.

For the full year, MAB admitted it did “underperform against [its] budget” compared to the previous year. This was largely due to a weaker first half, as well as exchange rate movements and fuel price increases. MAB said it recovered in the second half thanks to a closer focus on yield.

Group CEO Izham Ismail said MAB will “continue to focus on and drive yield to cushion the group from rising fuel costs and foreign exchange volatility.” The carrier aims to grow its premium and corporate business, and it opened its upgraded domestic and regional lounges at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in the fourth quarter. A customer experience taskforce was established in November, reporting to the CEO weekly.

MAB said it remains on track with its proposed dedicated charter service for Hajj and Umrah flights, and it is expected to begin service in October. MAB is in the process of applying for an air operator’s certificate for the new unit. It will use MAB’s Airbus A380s, although these aircraft will also be used on high-demand scheduled routes during peak seasons.

While traffic is growing strongly in Southeast Asia, “overcapacity remains a challenge” in the region, MAB said. For this reason, the carrier is maintaining a “cautious outlook” for 2018, with capacity expected to put pressure on yields. MAB said it will be “agile” in controlling capacity, and has already scaled back frequency on some domestic routes.

—Adrian Schofield, avweekso@gmail.com

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REGULATORY/LEGISLATIVE

Analysts: Trump Tariffs Could Set Stage For Trade Battle

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's decision to impose U.S. tariffs on imported steel and aluminum should have only a minor negative effect on aerospace manufacturers, albeit possibly more so for smaller suppliers versus large. But financial analysts say the tariffs point to a much greater concern for industry: a trade war with China.

"Assuming the tariffs move ahead, we see potential second-order effects, such as a trade war with China, as the main risks for aerospace," J.P. Morgan analysts said March 2. "Other countries' responses to tariffs will be a key determinant of their ultimate impact on aircraft demand, and China stands out here as a critical buyer of airplanes and a leading target of the administration's proposed tariffs."

About a third of Boeing 737 deliveries last year went to China, according to the analysts, and the Asian giant accounts for more than 20% of Boeing's commercial backlog.

The analysis came a day after Trump surprised seemingly everyone with specific, ominous tariffs on the materials. "President Trump caught most of his own economic, foreign policy, and national security advisers off guard yesterday when he did what they have been trying to forestall for months, announcing across-the-board tariffs of 25% and 10% on imported steel and aluminum," analysts at Capital Alpha Partners said.

Costs Passed

J.P. Morgan said Boeing should be able to pass on costs associated with the tariffs, and that even major suppliers such as Spirit AeroSystems and Triumph Group "should be fairly well protected, too." Assuming aluminum accounts for 70% of the weight of a 777 or 787—and "far lower" on a 787—and that materials account for 30% of the price of an aircraft, then a 10% increase in aluminum is less than a 2% increase in the price of the aircraft with the highest metal content. That is no showstopper, they contended.

Among the U.S. companies that may be harder-hit include materials supplier and engineering provider Arconic. J.P. Morgan estimated a 10% tariff on primary aluminum could cut Arconic's pretax earnings by around 2% over a year. At the same time, the company could benefit if the Trump administration places tariffs on foreign products that Arconic manufactures.

Meanwhile, industry will watch global trade developments for signs of tensions turning into trouble, and early signs pointed to emerging tensions. Leading U.S. ally and partner Canada issued a statement putting Washington on notice.

"As a key NORAD and NATO ally, and as the number one customer of American steel, Canada would view any trade restrictions on Canadian steel and aluminum as absolutely unacceptable," said Chrystia Freeland, Canada's minister of foreign affairs.

She noted that the U.S. has a $2 billion surplus in steel trade with Canada and that Canada buys more American steel than any other country in the world, accounting for 50% of U.S. exports. Last but not least, under U.S. law Canada is included as a part of the U.S. National Technology and Industrial Base related to national defense.

"Should restrictions be imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum products," Freeland said, "Canada will take responsive measures to defend its trade interests and workers."

— Michael Bruno, michael.bruno@aviationweek.com
Airlines

Copa Not Planning Third-Party MRO Offerings

Panama-based Copa Airlines does not plan to use its soon-to-be-expanded maintenance capabilities to branch out into third-party work, a top executive at the airline said.

"For now, I think that we're comfortable with [serving] our own needs," Copa CFO Jose Montero told analysts on a recent earnings call. "I think we think the plan in the immediate future is just simply to cater to our own requirements in terms of maintenance."

Copa is building a new hangar at its Tocumen International Airport home base in Panama City, and expects the facility to be ready in the 2018 fourth quarter. It will accommodate three narrowbodies simultaneously.

The hangar "more than doubles our current capacity in terms of ability to perform heavy checks here locally," Montero said. "So we will have that expanded capability in the latter part of this year."

Copa operates Boeing 737-700s and -800s and Embraer E-190s, and will begin taking deliveries of 737 Max family aircraft later this year. The carrier's 2018 fleet plan has it operating 106 aircraft by year-end: 19 E-190s, 14 737-700s, 68 737-800s and its first five 737-9s.

The new hangar is part of the airline's strategy to reduce maintenance expenses, in part by handling more of its own work. Other efficiency improvements include installing a new MRO software, IFS Mxi Maintainx, last year. The new $15 million hangar will not just handle airframe MRO, but also will house back-shops and parts storage. It also will serve as a paint shop and will handle certain components, such as landing gear.

--Sean Broderick, avweeksean@gmail.com

Suppliers

French Company Offers Lightweight Seat For Boeing 737

LYON, France—Expliseat, a French startup company that produces aircraft seats, is offering a lightweight economy-class seat for the Boeing 737.

Expliseat seats can be found in some Airbus A320 and ATR 42/72 cabins.

The titanium-composite 737 seat, dubbed TiSeat E2, is 60% lighter than the competition, Expliseat said. Its weight per passenger stands at 5 kg (11 lb). On a Boeing 737-10, the total weight reduction is estimated at up to 1.7 metric ton (3,700 lb). This translates to a 4% fuel consumption improvement.

In addition to being lightweight, the TiSeat E2’s offers flexible options for filling foam, seat-back angles, infight entertainment system space, electric outlets, folding trays and pockets. “Dozens of carriers have tried the product,” the company said.

The TiSeat E2 is the production version of the ”Titanium Seat NEO, a "concept seat" designed with the Peugeot Design Lab for the Airbus A320 and A330, among others. It is therefore suitable for long-haul flights such as on an A330 or a 747, but would also work on the Bombardier C Series, the company said.

Expliseat was born in 2011 and fitted an A320 cabin with its own seats for the first time in 2013. It has since enjoyed limited success, given the fast production rates at Airbus and ATR. Among the 50 cabins it has equipped, a majority are 40- to 70-seat ATRs and fewer than 10 are 150-seat A320 family aircraft. Customer airlines include France's Air Mediterranean, Democratic Republic of Congo’s FlyCAA, Cebu Pacific and Air Tahiti.

--Thierry Dubois, thierry.dubois@aviationweek.com
## Industry Data

### U.S. Airlines Seasonally-Adjusted Monthly Domestic Load Factor

**Systemwide (Domestic) RPMs/ASM**  
(Both Seasonally-Adjusted) In Percent  
*Scheduled Service Only*

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*Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, T-100 Market*

### U.S. Airlines Seasonally Adjusted Domestic Load Factor 2017

![Graph showing the monthly load factor for 2017](#)
### Industry Data: SpeedNews Aircraft & Engines Marketplace

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### Aircraft Engines for Sale/Lease

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CALENDAR

To list an event, send information in calendar format to Donna Thomas at donna.thomas@aviationweek.com. For a complete list of Aviation Week Network’s upcoming events, and to register, visit www.aviationweek.com/events (Bold type indicates new calendar listing.)


Mar. 23—NBAE Regional Forum, Fort Worth, Texas, www.nbae.org


Mar. 27—ATW’s Airline Industry Achievement Awards, Dublin, Ireland. For more information go to https://awards.atwonline.com/en/home.html

Apr. 3-8—FIDAE International Air and Space Fair, Santiago, Chile. For more information go to https://www.fidae.cl/?lang=en

Apr. 4-5—Aviation Leaders Forum, Santiago, Chile. For more information go to https://www.kallman.com/shows/aviation-leaders-forum

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