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Robert E. Johnson
CEO of Southwest Airlines
2702 Love Field Drive
Dallas, TX 75235

Mr. Johnson:

I was very disappointed to learn of a grueling experience players of the Ability360 Wheelchair Suns had with Southwest Airlines last month. I request you provide me with the steps you intend to take to ensure this does not happen to future travelers with mobility devices.

The Wheelchair Suns are a Phoenix-based team that were on their way to compete in Virginia for the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Championship Series. When the players' chairs were loaded in the plane's cargo hold, Southwest staff removed the wheels from their chairs -- despite players' explicit instructions to leave the wheels on to avoid damage. After they landed in Richmond, players from Phoenix and two other teams were stuck on the plane for more than two hours while they watched their chairs -- necessary equipment for them to participate in the game -- fall off the conveyor belt and on to the ground.¹ Players and their families then had to spend four more hours at the airport making sure everyone's wheels were put back on correctly.

People depend on mobility devices to move about the world. These devices are expensive -- few are less than \$100, and prices can range into tens of thousands of dollars depending on the complexity of the device. Unfortunately, wheelchair damage in flight is not a unique event. The Government Accountability Office found more than 10,000 wheelchairs were damaged in 2019 by the airlines, and found additional barriers remain for passengers with disabilities.²

After hours of delays and the manipulation of their devices, Southwest offered Wheelchair Suns players travel vouchers of just \$150. This travel voucher will not be able to assist with potential damage to these mobility devices or make up for time lost ahead of the Championship competition.

As a Member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I would like to know what Southwest is doing following this incident to better train and educate their employees on how to

¹ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2024/04/26/ability360-wheelchair-suns-speaks-out-after-southwest-flight/73384626007/>

² <https://www.gao.gov/assets/820/813324.pdf>

properly care for and stow mobility devices. What will the strategy be to ensure anyone who is traveling with a mobility device is treated with dignity, and is able to exit a landed aircraft in a timely manner?

When families book plane tickets, they expect to get where they're going safely, on time and at a reasonable cost. Those travelling with disabilities have so much more to consider as they plan travel, and we should do what we can to make their travel as seamless as possible. I look forward to hearing your plan on how to avoid situations like this in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Stanton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress