

United Airlines reaches settlement with passenger

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Between high ticket costs and additional fees, children screaming or kicking seats, and delays due to weather, air travel can be stressful. But travelers' lists of grievances almost never include being pulled out of one's seat and dragged off the plane by security officers, it recently became reality for one passenger.

On Sunday, April 9, video surfaced of 69-year-old Kentucky physician Dr. David Dao being forcibly removed from a United Airlines plane scheduled to travel from Chicago to Louisville. Because four United employees needed to be onboard the plane so they could reach a connecting flight, passengers were asked to give up their seat in exchange for a seat on the next available flight and a \$400 voucher.

None of the passengers were willing to accept this offer, even when the voucher was increased to \$800, so four passengers were randomly selected to leave the plane. Three of these passengers left without incident. The fourth, Dao, stated that he was a doctor and that he had to see patients the next morning; he refused to comply with the airline's directives, and the police were brought in to remove him.

Dao's daughter, Crystal Pepper, later revealed in a press conference that her father developed a concussion,

broke his nose, damaged his sinuses, and lost two front teeth because of the incident. He has since retained a lawyer and is expected to file a lawsuit. Thomas Demetrio, Dao's lawyer, also issued a statement at the press conference: "Dr. Dao, I believe to his great credit, has come to understand that he is the guy, he's the guy to stand up for passengers going forward."

In the days following the video's initial surfacing, United stock suffered a \$255 million loss and protestors swarmed Chicago O'Hare Airport with signs saying "Beat your competition, not your customers." On Chinese social networking website Weibo, Chinese citizens called for a boycott of the airline as "United Airlines forced passenger off the plane" became a trending topic with over 580 million posts.

Three days after the incident, United Airlines CEO Oscar Munoz appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America" to issue a public apology. In the interview, Munoz stated, "This will never happen again. We are not going to put a law enforcement official onto a plane to take [passengers] off ... to remove a booked, paid, seated passenger. We can't do that." He also vowed to review the airline's policies so that a similar situation would not occur in the future.

Recent policy changes for United seem to have considered this concern. On April 14, United Airlines announced that all employee bookings would now need to be made an hour before the flight's departure. Under previous policies, employees were unable to book their

places on these flights until departure time.

Other companies are also seizing this opportunity to review their policies and avoid a similar situation. American Airlines updated their rules by saying that passengers can no longer be removed from a flight they had already boarded to make room for another passenger. Delta Airlines, which had the lowest rate of forced passenger removals prior to the United incident, increased the amount of money employees could now pay passengers to forfeit their seat. Under the new regulations, customer service agents can now offer up to \$800, and supervisors can now offer up to \$9,950, instead of previous limits of \$200 and \$1,350 respectively.

In response to the incident, The Chicago Department of Aviation told ABC News that the officers involved were not following standard operating procedure. They added that one of the involved officers had been placed on paid administrative duty until further investigations could be conducted.

Both Dr. Dao and United Airlines have reached a settlement on the 27th. One of Dr. Dao's lawyers, Thomas A. Demetrio lauded United Airlines for their handling of this situation: "In addition, United has taken full responsibility for what happened on Flight 3411, without attempting to blame others, including the City of Chicago. For this acceptance of corporate accountability, United is to be applauded." The details of the settlement have not been released.