

**EPISODE 223**

[EPISODE]

**[00:00:07] IP:** Hello, and welcome to Episode 223 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

**[00:00:16] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian, how was your holiday weekend?

**[00:00:20] IP:** Hello, Jason. It was nice. It was nice. We didn't do too terribly much. We celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July out at the in-laws, so we just set up some inflatable pools and all that good fun stuff.

**[00:00:34] JR:** That's great.

**[00:00:35] IP:** We did go see some fireworks last night. We're recording this on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, and I took my oldest to go see some fireworks, and there were two Cessna 172s orbiting near where a bunch of cities had their fireworks displays going. I was thinking to myself that that's like a really nice way to view a large collection of municipal fireworks all at once.

**[00:01:01] JR:** Yes, to think of it, I don't even recall there being a TFR issued over New York preventing anyone from getting up in their 172 and orbiting over the fireworks. Maybe there was and I missed it. But I'd be surprised if a lot of people didn't kind of flock to that idea. Because there's definitely a lot of sightseeing helicopter. So yes, why not orbit in your little Cessna as well. That's fun.

**[00:01:24] IP:** Get your night hours in and watch some fireworks. It was fun. It was fun. How was your holiday, sir?

**[00:01:29] JR:** Good. I didn't do anything.

**[00:01:30] IP:** That's a good report to hear.

**[00:01:32] JR:** Four days and nothing. It was fantastic.

**[00:01:35] IP:** That's a good report to hear.

**[00:01:36] JR:** Too hot in New York to do anything.

**[00:01:39] IP:** Yes, we're approaching that today. Let's make a judgment call as we begin the show. Do we want to continue with where we left off last week and wrap that up? Or do we want to start with breaking news?

**[00:01:49] JR:** Let's pick up where we left off, because correctly news doesn't really work in a podcast that you listen two days after the fact. At least two days after the fact.

**[00:01:57] IP:** That's fair. All right. So, we'll go with the continuity aspect of things. Last week, we talked about United Airlines, and it's myriad issues, especially at its Newark hub, and rippling across the country –

**[00:02:14] JR:** The world. Not even just the country. Global impact for United.

**[00:02:19] IP:** So, they had – their operations were impacted much more dramatically than other airlines because of their hub at Newark, and things expanded from there. We'll talk a fair bit about United CEO, Scott Kirby, on this episode. Kirby sent out a letter ostensibly to United employees, but I believe the letter was also shared widely with the media. So, it was more of an open letter. Jason, you pulled some tidbits from the letter.

**[00:02:49] JR:** Yes. I didn't even have to pull any tidbits out because the letter was actually a really good letter, really clearly spells out the difficulty that is ongoing at Newark. It goes on to say what has happened is truly unprecedented severe weather focused at Newark, and I would – yes, I'd agree with that. It was kind of wild for a while. It goes on to list bullet point saying that Newark typically has 40 departures per hour scheduled, not great, not terrible. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, they were limited to less than 20 departures for four hours. Not great. That's half of the departure capacity.

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, the following day, they were limited to less than 20 departures per hour for nine hours. Then on the following day, June 27<sup>th</sup>, they were limited to less than 20 departures per hour for six hours, which is functionally the whole day, especially since these afternoon thunderstorms fire up in the afternoon where you have your heavy departure banks to the west coast or to Europe, or really anywhere out of Newark. That's not great. I quote here, "That means the total number of aircraft that could depart Newark was reduced between 60% and 75% for an average of six to eight hours per day. Airlines including United simply aren't designed to have their largest hub have its capacity severely limited for four straight days and still operate successfully."

Yes, I agree with that. That's probably unprecedented short of a massive hurricane coming in and shutting down the hub for days on end, which has happened in the past, but that's an event you can prepare for, planned for, and work around. Not great. The letter then goes on to explain why some of this happened, and some of the – I'm not going to call them excuses, but reasons provided are quite interesting. First of all, we already know that the FAA is an N90 facility, the New York City TRACON is short staffed, understaffed, overworked with a lot of trainees on the job who probably don't know all the tricks and things to get flights out that they're now retired counterparts may have done in the past, which limits capacity. Thunderstorms that typically hit Newark first when rolled through New York City. They didn't roll through New York City. They kind of just hung out to the west of Newark and just totally closed off flight routes to the west.

I thought this was particularly interesting, Ian. They blamed Canada for some of it. We love to blame Canada, especially on Canada Day weekend. But to go on, turns out the FAA is not the only air traffic control entity in North America with staffing issues. Canada, Nav Canada has issues as well. What happens when there are a lot of departure gates off to the West in North America that are closed, sometimes they can sneak flights way up to the north up to basically Toronto and then shuffle them off west to the West Coast.

Apparently, that's not even a possibility now, because Nav Canada is also shorthanded, and they weren't able to even send flights up to the north and then to the west. Those were another set of departure routes that United would have used pre-COVID that just were not available to it. They go on to say, "Here's five things that immediately come to mind to stop this from happening in the future. More improvements to crew technology." We talked about this a ton

with Southwest's meltdown last December, which was a very different meltdown. But there were some of the same similarities here where their crew scheduling just could not keep up with four days of absolute operational chaos.

Number two, partnership with the FAA is critical. Yes, of course, we know that. Step three, again, support the FAA efforts to find long-term solutions, going to take a while, but it involves doing something with the FAA reauthorization to finally get more controllers and staff back up. And number four is probably the most interesting. I quote, "We need to balance departures and arrivals at EWR. When departure routes are shut down because of thunderstorms to the west, arriving aircraft keep landing. And because aircraft can't depart to create space for them, they fill up the taxiways, because they're stuck in a long line. If just one aircraft in that line is waiting to depart, then all the aircraft behind them are stuck. So, the whole conga line is trapped."

Basically, that leads into number five, where they go to say, "EWR is the best international gateway that exists anywhere in the country." I'm sure some people will take exception to that. But it may come down to it that they will further reduce change, do something to their schedule at Newark to give them more gate space and more buffer. But it sounds like United may have to trim down their Newark schedule, yet again.

**[00:07:29] IP:** Yes, even further than the roughly 10% that the FAA gave them as slack already, even before the summer started. This was back in April.

**[00:07:40] JR:** Yes, not great, and there are some new gates coming online, I think, in maybe late this summer. So, that should help a little bit. But the major problem seems to be that flights can't get a route out to the West, so they can't push off their gate. And then incoming flights can't get to a gate, particularly international flights, since not all gates can accept international arrival, and then they just end up sitting on the taxiway for two, three, four hours. That's four hours of flight can't be turned to go –

**[00:08:08] IP:** And then they go back to the gate because they don't want to get busted by the FAA for gate or tarmac delays.

**[00:08:16] JR:** Right. It's just not good. I would strongly suggest avoiding Newark for at least the remainder of the summer, as best you can. But if you're a united passenger, that's not exactly an easy task.

**[00:08:28] IP:** No, and even if you're avoiding Newark, I mean, like you said, this was a global issue because those – because of Newark's importance to the United Network, you end up with knock on effects, not just in Newark, you end up with knock on effects at basically any hub, but also anywhere that you're trying to get to from Newark, especially if you're a smaller city where you're only served from Newark, and then the plane that's coming there is not coming, which means you're not getting out.

**[00:09:00] JR:** Yes, not great. There is no easy short-term solution to this. One of the only short-term solutions that the FAA proposed was to move some of New York's air traffic control operations from N90 to Philly, and that did not happen for reasons that I think they were beyond the FAA's control. The one thing they tried to do to prevent something like this from happening, they weren't able to do and schedules are – it's not maintainable even on the nicest of days now, things are not going well. If you add one thunderstorm sell, the FAA can just not keep up like they used to. In the past, storms like that, it would not have been the problem that it is now. So, this is is going to be a long-term problem that is not good for anyone.

**[00:09:45] IP:** It is not. But, well, Scott Kirby was writing his well-explained analysis of the situation, I think. Certainly, it glosses over the United issues a bit, but I thought it was overall very well written. While he was doing that, he was also not flying United necessarily, and took a private jet from Newark to Denver last Wednesday.

**[00:10:14] JR:** Yes, I think we have a differing opinion on this for a change. I'll let you view your point of view first.

**[00:10:22] IP:** Sure. So, I feel like you need to do some background on this to provide some insight into what happened here.

**[00:10:30] JR:** Okay. Basically, Scott Kirby, I think the Wednesday before the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday was spotted at an FBO. I think it was Newark, somewhere in the New York City. Newark flying

out of an FBO, which is the private jet terminal, basically, and flew off to Denver. There was kind of mass disagreement, or maybe disagreement is the wrong word, but mass uproar.

**[00:10:56] IP:** Disparagement?

**[00:10:58] JR:** Disparagement, there you go. How could he do this? How could the CEO of an airline that has an operation that's been collapsing for days with people stranded and stuck in the airport for days? How could he just get on a private jet, ignore all the issues on the ground and fly off to Denver before the holiday weekend. It is a bad look. It is a really bad look. It was an own goal, did not need to happen. I'm sure he's upset that he was caught doing it. But yes, really, really not a good look to fly private, on a hub to hub route of your own airline where there should be hundreds available seat on any particular day.

**[00:11:35] IP:** Jason, I'm not really sure where our difference of opinion here is.

**[00:11:38] JR:** Well, here's the difference of opinion. You agree. You think it was a bad idea. He should not have done that. There is no business meeting important enough to have to do that, especially when he, in his apology, said he paid for the flight himself, not United, and that there's nothing an airline CEO would need to do in person short of like, did he have the key to restart the airline and only he could turn the key? And he had to get there. I don't know.

**[00:12:07] IP:** Denver Airport is quite mysterious.

**[00:12:10] JR:** Yes. We don't know what happens under Lucifer, the devil works, or whatever we want to call him. I don't know.

**[00:12:17] IP:** We never really talked about that on the podcast. I think we should do an entire episode on it.

**[00:12:20] JR:** We should. Lucifer, I think its name, is Lucifer is the horse statue somewhere in the roadway, the access roadways of Denver Airport with the red glowing eyes, really creepy. But I just love how Denver Airport totally leans into it's –

**[00:12:35] IP:** I love it. I love it.

**[00:12:35] JR:** – whole conspiracy theory, history. It's pretty great. But here's where we diverge. It would not have been great if he was traveling for leisure. Yes, he does. I believe he has a residence here in New York, and he has a residence in Denver. If in fact, he was traveling between New York and Denver, to get out to his family or whatever for the holiday weekend, and not for business travel. I think that would be wrong. That would have been a huge lapse in judgment, short of forcibly removing a passenger off a United Aircraft, which we know is not something you should do. They have done that in the past. It's a no, no. This is probably the worst thing he could have done, if it was for personal travel.

If it truly was for business travel, and there was something he had to get to Denver to attend, or to do, or to see. What are the other options? There were no other seats available on any airline. This wasn't a thing where you couldn't buy a ticket on United. You couldn't buy a ticket west of New York on any airline for days. So, if there's truly something he needed to attend to, and he was willing to pay for a private jet himself, what's the harm? I guess?

**[00:13:44] IP:** Here's my thing. The way that they went about explaining it is patently ridiculous.

**[00:13:52] JR:** How did they explain it?

**[00:13:53] IP:** Here's my thing. There are no seats. Great, fine. But then he apologized for taking a private jet and paid for himself, which says to me that it is not a business expense, because if it was a business expense, then the airline should have picked up the tab. If he's paying for this himself, either, he should have said, "You know what, I didn't want to take a seat on our airline away from any of our paying customers".

**[00:14:20] JR:** Which is the right thing to do.

**[00:14:22] IP:** Right. "So, I booked" – he should have leaned into it. "I booked a private jet because I had business to attend to that would get our airline functioning." Again, these are two of our largest hubs. And unfortunately, we didn't have any seats available because of factors outside of our control. He could have reiterated all of these things, could have gone on the

offensive and said, “You know what, this was the least disruptive option to our personnel and to our customers. And I chose to take a private jet because that was the fastest option for me to do business to get the airline back on its feet.

**[00:14:54] JR:** Yes. Should have taken Amtrak.

**[00:14:56] IP:** Should have taken – well, he would have gotten there next week. But he didn't say it. He apologized and said it wasn't a good luck, and said that he paid for it himself. That says to me that it wasn't something that you were doing to make things better. You were just doing it to go there. I don't care why he went. I don't care if it was for a business meeting or for personal, whatever. But by not saying, “Look, this is what we did and we're sticking by it by apologizing for it”, I think that shows that, yes, it was a bad move, and that they shouldn't have done it. He shouldn't have done it.

**[00:15:29] JR:** Yeah, I get it. But honestly, I don't recall who said this on Twitter. But the best thing they could have done was if this was business travel, they could have looked at the standby list for people who desperately trying to get to Denver and say, “You know what, we got another way for you to go. Meet us at the FBO at four o'clock and we'll get you to Denver.”

**[00:15:47] IP:** Yes. That would have been great.

**[00:15:50] JR:** They could have turned this into a win. Instead, they turned it into a double loss, almost.

**[00:15:56] IP:** They could have found a woman and a polka band, and they could have put them on a private jet from Newark to Denver, and you would have had Home Alone five or six or whatever they're up to that day, and it would have been game over.

**[00:16:09] JR:** Well, fortunately, the public has a limited memory for stuff like this.

**[00:16:14] IP:** I'm glad you said that. Because this doesn't matter in six days. It doesn't even matter now, except this is the industry we talked about. Where it matters, is the next time there's a meltdown, the next time something goes wrong, the next time the pilots are upset, the next



time the flight attendants are upset, the next time the baggage handlers are upset. The next time any stakeholder in United is upset, or feels wronged or slighted or something goes bad. They're going to remember this.

**[00:16:45] JR:** That next time is now. I said the general public. But right now, through all of this erupts, United's Pilot's Union has been fanning the flames quite a bit to saying this is all Kirby's fault. This is all management's fault. Probably because they have contract negotiations ongoing for quite a while now. So, if nothing else, yes, this is – I'd imagine this is going to make it into the union's –

**[00:17:09] IP:** The union's monthly circular.

**[00:17:09] JR:** – for quite a while, until the contract negotiations are over, they get a new contract, and suddenly they'll go, "Oh, yes. We never cared about that. It was just really useful." They'll never say that. But you know that's what's happening. Anyway, I'm sick of this topic. What's next?

**[00:17:25] IP:** Moving on. All right, so breaking-ish news, this news is very broken, and we have no idea what's happening. But we're going to talk about it, because none of it makes any sense. The Northeast Alliance, which was struck down by a judge a few months ago now, that was supposed to be unwound within 30 days. That didn't happen, because everybody said that's not going to work. American Airlines said they were going to appeal the judge's decision because they think it's wrong. JetBlue had not said anything for a very long time. Today on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July in what seems like some sort of securities filing deadline issue, because the 5<sup>th</sup> of July seems like a weird time to announce this. They should have announced it like on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and no one would have paid any attention to it.

**[00:18:10] JR:** I think they want you to pay attention to it, though. I think, that's the point.

**[00:18:13] IP:** Maybe. Maybe. In any case, JetBlue has said they will not be appealing the judge's ruling, to try and get this ruling overturned and keep the NEA, and I'll read a bit from JetBlue statement. "Despite our deep conviction in the pro-competitive benefits of the NEA. After much consideration, JetBlue has made the difficult decision not to appeal the court's

determination that the NEA cannot continue as currently crafted, and has instead initiated the termination of the NEA beginning a wind down process that will take place over the coming months. We will now turn even more focus to our proposed combination with Spirit, which is the best and most effective opportunity to truly transform the competitive landscape in the US, and bring the “JetBlue” effect to more routes and markets across the country.”

**[00:19:04] JR:** Oh, that's a lot of words.

**[00:19:05] IP:** That's a lot of words. So, long story short, they're not appealing the ruling and they hope by not appealing the ruling, they can convince the US DOJ to say, “Yes, you guys can merge with Spirit”, because the DOJ is currently suing JetBlue to prevent the merger with spirit saying, “It too is anti-competitive.”

**[00:19:23] JR:** Okay. Basically, JetBlue has thrown in the sacrificial goat to the volcano hoping that it won't erupt for the actual thing they really want. They really, really want, and clearly value more the Spirit merger. That is what they want. That is the true goal. The NEA in this point is expendable, and it has been expended unless your airline name happens to be American.

**[00:19:49] IP:** Because American today issued a statement of its own. “JetBlue has advised us that it will not join the appeal in the district court ruling of the Northeast Alliance case. We, of course, respect JetBlue's decision to focus on its other antitrust and regulatory challenges. At the same time, JetBlue's decision and reasoning confirm our belief that the NEA has been highly pro-competitive, and that an erroneous judicial decision disregarding the NEA's consumer benefits has led to an anti-competitive outcome.

American will therefore move forward with an appeal. “JetBlue has been a great partner and we will continue to work with them to ensure mutual customers can travel seamlessly without disruption to the travel plans.” So, JetBlue says, “No, no, we're not going to appeal. DOJ, please let us get Spirit.” American says, “Hey, JetBlue made some good points. We're going ahead with this appeal, whether JetBlue wants to be part of the Alliance or not.”

**[00:20:43] JR:** I mean, I get it. American has nothing to lose at this point. It's not like it's going to merge with anyone else anytime soon. There's no one left to merge with or buy up and –

**[00:20:56] IP:** Don't say things like that.

**[00:20:55] JR:** I don't think American has the financial capacity to do such a thing again. But yes, it makes sense in a stupid way. American has nothing to lose. NEA means more to it than it means to JetBlue. Yes, I guess maybe JetBlue is doing some sort of 4D chess here where it's hoping American fights this appeals it and they get to have their cake and eat it too. I don't know. So far, it doesn't seem like JetBlue is playing on some galaxy brain level. But maybe they have been and we all just haven't seen it until now.

**[00:21:27] IP:** To me, JetBlue, not appealing the decision makes sense. That makes I guess, you make a good point that American's appeal does make sense in the sense that, yes, they do have nothing to lose. But I mean, it's just interesting to me that you now have – JetBlue is saying, “Okay, it's dead.” American is say, “No.” I guess my question is what happens, and we get back to the dog catching the car here. What happens if American is successful on appeal?

**[00:21:54] JR:** I guess it will take so long on appeal that any ruling that comes out of that will happen after a ruling for Spirit. So possibly, JetBlue does what they need to do to satisfy the DOJ. They get to gobble up Spirit. Then at a later point, they also get to reenact the NEA in some form or another. At that point, it's a question of whether or not JetBlue wants or even needs it, since it will have gobbled up Spirit. But I'm sure if they've done it before, they can do it again in some capacity, because American does need it. American is appealing it because A, it has nothing to lose. And B, this is going to be a significant operational and financial headache to unwind all of this. If they can do something to stop it from unwinding in the first place, or at least having the blueprints to put it back into place, I'm sure that would be beneficial for American. JetBlue at this point is just kind of along for the ride.

**[00:22:49] IP:** Good luck to them. This all broke right before we hit record, which in and of itself is a mystery of the universe that I do not fully understand. Because it isn't two weeks in a row. It's two out of three, where news has come out before we hit record. If you're new to the podcast, you'll quickly learn if you listen to following episodes that that very rarely happens. If you're a longtime listener of the podcast, you're probably just as shocked as we are.

**[00:23:18] JR:** Yeah, one more thing. If you're an American or JetBlue passenger, you're probably wondering what is this all mean for me? We don't really know. We don't know. They don't know at this point, and I'll quote an internal statement from JetBlue where they say, "For customers, the wind down plan must not disrupt those who have booked travel with us. We're working with American to ensure customers can be confident in new and existing bookings in coming months. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. While nothing changes for now, eventually, we may need to cancel some routes that were previously made possible by the NEA due to slot and gate constraints or commercial viability. But it's too early to consider specifics at this time."

Yes, I wouldn't be super thrilled if I had an American flight booked through JetBlue or the other way around, or let's say flying JetBlue LaGuardia to Boston, which was an American route. Maybe that goes back to American. I don't know. Way too early to know the customer impacts. But we do know there will be customer impacts if the NEA is unwound.

**[00:24:15] IP:** We will certainly cover those customer impacts when they are known and when we start to see them. Absolutely, we will. But for now, we wait.

**[00:24:24] JR:** That was a lot of US carrier news. Tell me there isn't any more, because we need to tell the people that we are a global podcast, that we care about stuff that happened in other countries. But let's talk about Delta instead.

**[00:24:38] IP:** We got to hit the big three. Though, to be fair, this is international news. Then, there's plenty to talk about further down the list.

So, we briefly touched on this a while ago because there wasn't much to it besides the war of words between Delta Airlines and United Airlines going back and forth about Delta's application to the US DOT for a slot waiver request. Delta wanted to be able to serve Tokyo's Haneda Airport from any US gateway of its choosing. Whereas they're currently limited to airport pairs. They have to serve from specific airports to Tokyo Haneda. Delta wanted to say, "Hey, let's use other airports." American and Hawaiian Airlines said, "Sure that sounds like a fine idea." United said, "Oh, no, no, no, no." There was a bit of back and forth, and by bit of back and forth, I mean, very, very loyal acrimony.

But the US DOT has now said that that's not going to happen, and Delta is not going to get its way. The DOT says the airline's request was unwarranted, not in the public interest, and would undermine the department's rationale for selecting existing carriers and gateways over other competing applicants. They said that you're more than welcome to apply next time around and pick whatever cities you want, and we'll consider the application on its merits. But there's no way that we're going to let you play willy-nilly with whatever gateway pairs you want, based on the existing pairs that there are. United also didn't get its way, although less important, United said, "Hey, we'll take these slots. I would be happy to take these off your hands." And the DOT said, "No, they haven't talked over to figure out what they're going to do with their lives, and then we can go back and revisit things." So, kind of how I thought it would go.

**[00:26:32] JR:** Yes. Yes. I'm definitely conflicted on this as someone who right now is booking or looking to book a flight to Japan and has lots of miles on Delta. I would simultaneously like Delta to offer better options from New York to Haneda, or even Narita at this point. But at the same time, I'd like to tell Delta to buzz off because its fares and miles redemptions are absolutely utterly ridiculous. I don't know. I'm split. But it seems like Delta's request was pretty, pretty out there. They never, never should have stopped flying to Tokyo from New York, a holdover from the northwest days. That was a mistake.

**[00:27:09] IP:** Yes. Well, best of luck to Jason.

**[00:27:14] JR:** Thank you.

**[00:27:14] IP:** And best of luck to Delta as they try and figure out how they're going to get to Tokyo.

Okay, now we go international with some very interesting news, because this one took a while to wind to the courts. But the captain of the Aeroflot Superjet flight that returned to Moscow in May of 2019, has been sentenced to six years in prison for his actions, causing the damage to the aircraft, which then led to a fire, which then led to the death of 41 of 78 people onboard the aircraft.

Going back, this was a Superjet that was struck by lightning, shortly after departure from Moscow. It returned. The aircraft suffered a hard landing, landing on its nose gear first, and then skidding. The engines were damaged severely, there was a huge fire, and there was a lot of focus on what happened or why this happened, giving the seemingly stabilized approach. Then, what happened after that. The court found that the captain's actions were not in line with a safe approach. His actions contributed to the severity of the damage to the aircraft and then the death of those people on board.

**[00:28:45] JR:** Yeah, not great. I don't know if a final report was ever issued by Russia. I know a preliminary report was, quite a while ago at this point. But I guess I would also love to know why a lightning strike had such a severe impact on the Superjets' systems. That is not something that's supposed to happen. I'm so much more interested in finding out what happened there, especially since the Superjet is going to become such a more important aircraft in Russia's domestic –

**[00:29:12] IP:** Indeed.

**[00:29:14] JR:** – system, that it's not supposed to happen.

**[00:29:17] IP:** Yes, the preliminary report was completed. The draft final report is supposed to be under review at the moment, but it has not been released. So, we'll have to take a look at, when in fact, that federal report is released. Jason?

**[00:29:33] JR:** Yes?

**[00:29:34] IP:** Do you remember a few years ago when there was an attempted coup in Turkey?

**[00:29:38] JR:** I do. I remember that there were tanks on Flightradar24 and – wait, I'm remembering it wrong.

**[00:29:46] IP:** No, you're remembering the reporting very accurately.

**[00:29:48] JR:** Oh, yes. You got to watch out where you get your news from.

**[00:29:52] IP:** So that, actually comes – the anniversary of that is coming up shortly. Where Sky News reported that the ground vehicles that were transmitting ATSB at Istanbul Airport, were in fact tanks. Amusing, yes, indicative of the level of aviation knowledge at a media organization.

**[00:30:16] JR:** I mean, what a diligent military that would be. If in the middle of the coup, you're driving your tank onto an active taxiway, you slap an ATSB transmitter on your roof and say, "Oh, got to be careful." We bought aircraft to nowhere here.

**[00:30:27] IP:** I appreciate that, I do. Earlier this week, an Aegean Airlines flight slowly depressurized while it was in flight, and because of that, conducted an emergency descent and diverted to Naples. They were flying from Thessaloniki to Barcelona, and they made an emergency descent and diverted to Naples in Italy. I bring all this up because Sky News put together a piece that I guess there was a well-known singer, and his family was on board. The whole Sky News article says, Chesney Hawkes, whom I've never heard of. So, I apologize if you're a fan. Told his kids, he loved them in a voice note as plane plunged 20,000 feet.

Okay, I will give them the headline. There's nothing inaccurate about that headline. I take issue with the word plunged. But technically it meets the definition of plunged. It did descend 20,000 feet. So, there's nothing wrong there.

**[00:31:32] JR:** At a fairly high rate, too. I think the maximum we recorded was 6,100 feet per minute, which is nothing to sneeze at.

**[00:31:41] IP:** It was an emergency – it was an emergency descent. And I'm not saying that the passengers on board who had no idea what was going on. I'm not saying they should not have been scared. I'm saying if that was the reaction, that should have been their reaction. I can completely understand that. What I take issue with is that in no point in the piece, did they use the opportunity to explain what happened. At no point in the piece did this reporter say, "You know what, I'm going to enlighten my readers as to what happened, why it happened, and why the plane descended to 20,000 feet as quick as it could. I'm going to explain to my readers, that

the pilots on board did a fantastic job of recognizing the issue, of mitigating the issue, and getting everyone on board, on the ground safely.” At no point did they do that.

So, I'm going to take a few moments to describe what happened. The aircraft slowly lost pressurization, happens from time to time. The pilots recognize this they don their oxygen masks, and they begin an emergency descent. Oxygen masks in the cabin dropped, passengers were instructed to put them on. They descended rather quickly. As Jason mentioned, the highest rate of descent was in the 6,000 feet per minute range. Most of the descent was 5,000 to 4,000, high 4,000 feet per minute until they got to 10,000 feet, which is the level of the atmosphere at which a normal human can breathe and there's enough oxygen. You don't need supplemental oxygen. No point does this guy's news article say any of this. But what they do put at the top of the page is a picture with the smiling singer and the captain from the flight afterwards, after they –

**[00:33:29] JR:** Wait. How are they smiling if they almost died?

**[00:33:32] IP:** It just –

**[00:33:35] JR:** I like this.

**[00:33:38] IP:** What? Me being upset?

**[00:33:38] JR:** I like how you're getting. Yes. It is nice.

**[00:33:42] IP:** Because this like sensationalism without – like I even gave them the headline, fine. I get it. Everyone's terrified. I would be scared too if I didn't know what was going on. But then if you land, and then what happens is the pilot comes on and talks to everybody and says, “Look, we lost pressurization. We conducted an emergency descent, and then we diverted the aircraft to make sure that everyone was safe.” No point is that included anywhere in the article. Do you know what those folks have the audacity to put on their webpage below this smiling photo?

**[00:34:16] JR:** A screenshot of Flightradar24, maybe?



**[00:34:18] IP:** No.

**[00:34:19] JR:** Okay. I haven't clicked on the link because I refuse to give them the click. But what's there?

**[00:34:22] IP:** I appreciate that about you. There's a line that says, "Why you can trust Sky News."

**[00:34:29] JR:** Oh, can you?

**[00:34:30] IP:** I'm not clicking that link. No sir.

**[00:34:31] JR:** Nope. Nope. Not clicking that one.

**[00:34:35] IP:** The whole thing is not to pick on Sky News, though. They have historically not been very good at Aviation reporting. My point here is that I think it's important to not only capture how people are feeling on board, because that's important too. Yes, people are scared. When the oxygen masks comes out, and people have no idea what's going on. People are scared. When the plane starts descending very quickly, without any warning, or with very minimal warning because the pilots are very busy. If I get it. But if you're writing about it after the fact, at least take a paragraph to say, "You know what, this happened because it was supposed to happen when this other thing happens."

**[00:35:11] JR:** Yes, no notes.

**[00:35:16] IP:** All right, where are we going to next, Jason?

**[00:35:17] JR:** Let's go to India. And we didn't talk about this before, because I forgot that this actually happened on Thursday of last week, or the report came out on Thursday, not Wednesday. But a report came out from the safety investigators, the AAIB in India, about – I did not know about this, when this happened. November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a SpiceJet 737-800, again, was

involved in a pressurization issue, just like what we talked about with Aegean. But it went very differently.

In this case, it's a very interesting report. I highly recommend anyone interested in aviation safety, or the operations of a commercial aircraft go read this and find out what not to do, if the automatic pressurization system on a 737 NG fails, because pretty much everything this crew did, almost led to the completely unnecessary – I'm not going to say a crash of this aircraft. But it was a lot more dangerous than it need to be. Because the pilot flying, for whatever reason, didn't follow procedure and did not put his oxygen mask on. For 60 to 90 seconds, not quite sure, in the report it says 60, 90 seconds was actually suffering from hypoxia, and momentary incapacitation, and was basically passed out because wasn't wearing the oxygen mask, didn't follow procedures. And for whatever reason, was not able to follow the procedures that the AAIB thankfully laid out in the report, about the procedures on what you're supposed to do if the automatic system fails. They basically accidentally led to the depressurization of this aircraft that did not need to happen. Then, that also led to the hypoxia of the pilot flying for up to a minute and a half, and almost caused the catastrophe, which is not great.

Go read the report. Very interesting. Very questionable practices by this crew. SpiceJet, your crews really should follow the words here. Follow the procedures and not accidentally pass out. Not good.

**[00:37:15] IP:** Good advice there.

**[00:37:16] JR:** Yes, good advice from – I mean, the company had good advice on its procedures and what to do here. But you would think they would know that if there's an issue with the pressurization problem system, put your mask on so you don't pass out should be –

**[00:37:29] IP:** Always put your mask on first before helping others.

**[00:37:33] JR:** There you go. But very interesting read. We'll put that in the show notes.

**[00:37:37] IP:** Yes, indeed, we will. We go to cargo now. A few notes on the cargo side of things. We don't cover it a whole lot, but some interesting stuff happening in recent news. Generally,

and I'm taking this from a FreightWaves article by Eric Kulisch. The article itself is about Amerijet, but it's got some good general stats. Volumes in the cargo market are down 1% to 4% this year. IATA says 3.8% decline in cargo demand in 2023, and levels are currently 5.3% below 2019 levels, which is leading to a little bit of a shake up on some of these smaller cargo carriers, or perhaps lesser known cargo carriers. Like I said, this article is about Amerijet, and they have just laid off 15 headquarter staff.

Well, their pilots have just ratified a new contract and they're continuing to hire pilots. So, they're being pressed with lower demand for their services. But they are paying their pilots more and bringing more pilots on as they try to do more flying. So, an interesting dynamic there at Amerijet. And Western Global is a carrier that is interesting for so many reasons. But there's a lot going on there right now. They're an operator, they've got a handful of 747s and a compendium of ancient MD-11s that are slowly being put out to pasture. What's happened here now is the CEO of the airline has just bought a bunch of discounted debt in the airline, because it seems like the airline is slowly marching towards bankruptcy. By buying this debt, the CEO has put himself at the head of the repayment queue in any bankruptcy filing.

**[00:39:37] JR:** Oh, that's some ninja level economics.

**[00:39:41] IP:** And the staff are not happy. The CEO, Jim Neff, in 2020, sold out his stake in the airline as a way to prevent the employees from unionizing didn't quite work out for him because the pilots unionized anyway. Then the airline was sued by the employees saying that they had to overvalued the shares that they got as a way of making them pay more for those shares. That does not sound like there's a lot of good stuff going on over here. So, keep an eye on an eventual or possible bankruptcy filing for –

**[00:40:15] JR:** The air cargo world is just so bizarre. It feels like there's only two extremes in that industry. Either everyone's happy, times are great, cargo levels are through the roof or, “Oh, geez, we're all out of jobs.” There's no cargo. It's doom and gloom forever. Very strange industry.

**[00:40:31] IP:** The pendulum swings much quicker in the cargo.

**[00:40:32] JR:** It does. It really does.

**[00:40:35] IP:** Well, on the brighter side of things, I guess, Hawaiian Airlines has taken delivery of its first A330 passenger to freighter conversion which they will operate for Amazon. It is a brand spanking new aircraft. It went from –

**[00:40:49] JR:** Wait a minute, it's not actually that new.

**[00:40:52] IP:** It is though.

**[00:40:53] JR:** It is a five-year-old aircraft that never entered service with anyone and came from your favorite non-taken up airline.

**[00:41:02] IP:** Oh, man, you did research?

**[00:41:04] JR:** I did.

**[00:41:05] IP:** I had a whole other thing prepared.

**[00:41:07] JR:** Literally seconds ago. But go on. Don't let me steal your thunder. Go on.

**[00:41:12] IP:** You ruined – the thunder is stolen. The thunder is gone.

**[00:41:13] JR:** Well, you can go on anyway.

**[00:41:16] IP:** All right, fine. The airframe never flew with passengers. It has now been converted to cargo. But of course, it came from Hong Kong Airlines, which is –

**[00:41:26] JR:** That's an interesting twist. It didn't come directly from Hainan.

**[00:41:29] IP:** A subsidiary of Hainan.

**[00:41:32] JR:** Oh, sorry. I stole your thunder. We knew. It was always going to be Hainan.

**[00:41:38] IP:** It was always going to be Hainan.

**[00:41:40] JR:** If there's an A330 that didn't have a home, it came from Hainan at some point.

**[00:41:45] IP:** There you go, or 787, or a 73 – it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what aircraft it is, maybe like a Ford trimotor you could not attribute to them.

Okay, so that aircraft will enter service later in the year with Hawaiian on behalf of Amazon. To close out the show some really interesting news, the first 737-800 COMBIs are coming. Air Inuit is going to have a trio of those. Those will eventually replace their 737-200s, so that's really cool. It'd be interesting to see those. They will have the large cargo doors, so that'll be fun.

**[00:42:21] JR:** Will they have the gravel kit, though? I don't think that's a thing.

**[00:42:22] IP:** I don't think they'll have the gravel kit. But it'll be interesting to see a 737-800 COMBI. To close, the show we had south of the border from us to Mexico because Viva Aerobus has ordered 90 More A321neos bringing their total on their order book to 170. A very good sized order book from them.

**[00:42:45] JR:** Yes, that is a lot of airplanes for an airline that is already quite large. I think, the continent's fastest growing market. I don't think there's any disputing that. But yes, they already have 40, 50 A320ceo family. I'm sorry, they already have 22 A320s, 9 A321s, 28 A320neos, and the A321neo. They've got a lot of aircraft already in service, already on the order book, ready to go. Very quickly growing airline. One day, maybe they'll even be allowed to start new routes into the US if that thing with the FAA ever –

**[00:43:22] IP:** Expect it this month, again.

**[00:43:25] JR:** Yes, we'll see.

**[00:43:26] IP:** We'll see. Hopefully, we'll have to talk – that'd be great to talk about next week. That would be fantastic. What a segue that would be, and start next week with, “Hey, Mexico's

back.” Let's stop talking now and hope that happens, so we at least have something to talk about next week. But until then, this has been Episode 223 of AvTalk. Thank you so very much for listening. I am Petchenik, here, as always, with –

**[00:43:51] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]