

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Presses Southwest Airlines' executives about holiday meltdown

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, in a U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) pressed Southwest Airlines' executives about their operational failures that led to major travel disruptions in December 2022 that left Wisconsin families stranded. Senator Baldwin told the story of a Wisconsin resident who, due to Southwest's meltdown, was forced to spend hundreds of dollars out of pocket and drive for more than 20 hours from Florida to Milwaukee to get home from holiday travel. Senator Baldwin discussed Southwest's failure to upgrade software, despite numerous warnings from pilots, and pressed the company to prioritize investing in updated technology to further protect consumers, not enrich their stockholders.

“Wisconsin families were left high and dry this holiday season – stranded in airports, driving across the country, and missing precious family time – because Southwest executives failed to prioritize their customers,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Southwest Airlines must invest in their technology and operations to ensure a meltdown like this can never happen, rather than paying out their wealthy stockholders. I look forward to using the information we gained today in our Committee's work to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration and strengthen protections for consumers.”

Between December 21 and December 31, 2022, Southwest canceled more than 16,700 flights as overwhelmed and inadequate software was unable to keep up with numerous flight changes in the wake of severe winter weather.

Air carriers who accepted Payroll Support Program relief funding during the

pandemic, like Southwest, were banned from conducting stock buybacks until September 2022. While Southwest has not yet conducted any stock buybacks, it was the first major carrier to reinstate stock dividends to shareholders since the start of the pandemic. In December 2022, just weeks before the holiday meltdown, Southwest announced that it would issue a \$428 million dividend in the first quarter of 2023. Senator Baldwin pressed Southwest to invest in software and update operations to prevent future disasters before enriching their shareholders through stock buybacks.

Senator Baldwin also described concerns regarding Southwest leadership's communication with Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport throughout the December meltdown and asked the company's leadership to commit to providing clear and improved communication with airports moving forward.

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).