



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 19, 2010

## Handicapped Passenger Told: “Too Disabled to Fly”

October 15, US Airways asked one of its passengers flying from West Palm Beach to Kansas City to exit the airplane. Johnnie Tuitel, 47, a motivational speaker with cerebral palsy, was told that he was “too disabled to fly.”

Dubbed the “Pioneer Handicapitalist,” [Tuitel](#) travels the country as an inspirational speaker to discuss his life story and his experiences as a handicapped man. In fact, he has logged nearly 500,000 miles to give his speeches.

However, Tuitel was unable to keep his September 23 commitment in Kansas City as he was delayed at Palm Beach International Airport. According to AOL News, “Tuitel actually made it onto the plane ... when a gate agent took him and wheeled him back to the terminal.” Tuitel was told that he required a companion.

Fox News reports, “Tuitel flew solo two days later on another airline, but by then he had missed the speech he was scheduled to give at the 2010 National Self Advocacy Conference.”

Tuitel describes his interaction with the gate agent during the incident:

I immediately thought something was wrong with my family. I let him take me off the plane.

He told me I could fly on US Airways if I could find a companion to go with me because I was a danger to myself and others if something went wrong.

Trust me, they made a mistake.

Strangely, the gate agent who removed Tuitel from the plane was the same one who had helped him onto the plane, and had assured Tuitel that he would attend to his comfort throughout the flight.

Tuitel believes that the agent made a personal decision about Tuitel’s impairment after he was seated on the plane. He asserts that the act goes beyond violating the American Disabilities Act.

He contends, “This is a flat-out issue of civil rights.”

Tuitel, who by all appearances seems to be in good health, explains his frustrations: “I was raised to believe I could grow up doing what I wanted to do and it didn’t lead me to any entitlement. By them denying me the ability to fly, I couldn’t do my job.”

US Airways has defended its position, pointing to its airline policy:

The airline requires that the passenger has to be physically able to assist himself or herself in the event of an emergency. If the passenger cannot, the airline requires that someone else travels





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with the passenger who can provide assistance in the event of an emergency.

Tuitel has contacted US Airways officials with plans to discuss the incident and concerns with the company's policy.

Fox News explains, "He said he hopes the company will change its policy to include a personal discussion with each person who buys a ticket so they know what to expect and eliminate any embarrassment."

Airlines have acquired a negative customer service reputation as of late with a variety of bizarre incidents such as that involving Tuitel.

In July, a thin woman flying standby on a Southwest Airlines flight was removed from the plane because an overweight passenger required two seats.

In August, a woman was removed from a Delta flight after asking the flight crew if the flight's captain had been drinking. She claimed she thought she smelled alcohol on the pilot's breath, but was apparently unable to address her concern without repercussion.

Also in August, a JetBlue flight attendant made headlines when he lost control, cursed at a passenger via the public-address system, grabbed beer from the galley, and exited the airplane on an emergency slide.

Tuitel views the incident with US Airways as an example of airline overreach, isolating it from other strange episodes. He is currently considering taking legal action.



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