



Spirit Airlines arrivals and departures in 2021.

The Year (Bleep) Got Real – and maybe saved

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Miami Herald



"There's a choice we're making. We're saving our own lives." – from "We Are The World"

Yes, this is early. That ritual where the columnist assigns the year a theme doesn't usually begin until December. But the view from this pew is that, where 2022 is concerned, said theme is already clear.

In recent days, this has begun to feel very much like The Year (Bleep) Got Real.

Sixteen years after Al Gore implored us to face "An Inconvenient Truth" and we didn't, we have seen climate change mutate from a seemingly abstract threat against a theoretical future to a series of unsettling headlines charting an immediate crisis – a right here, right now danger – facing all 8 billion passengers on this spaceship. International weather maps over the past two weeks looked like the Shenandoah Valley in October – a vista of deep reds and golds signifying blazing heat pretty much everywhere. Great Britain – cool, damp Britain – sweltered through its hottest day, ever, triple digits Fahrenheit. Meantime, wildfires have blackened great swaths of Spain, Italy, Portugal and France.

Closer to home, the Colorado River, the artery of water that makes Los Angeles possible, has gone saltine dry. The Great Salt Lake is vanishing, two-thirds of it gone and still shrinking. California is burning – again. The cascade effect of all this, the impact on human and animal migration, on the extinction of bugs, birds and beasts, on the weather patterns, on the economy, on air quality, on the habitability of the planet, cannot be overstated.

But if 2022 is, indeed, The Year (Bleep) Got Real, last week gave us reason to hope it might also go down as The Year

(Bleep) Got Saved. Senate Democrats agreed to a \$369 billion bill that is being called the nation's most ambitious effort yet to combat climate change. It includes tax incentives to encourage the development of alternative energy sources, the purchase of electric vehicles, the retrofitting of homes. With this measure, which the Senate could pass within days, the country might, by the end of this decade, cut greenhouse-gas emissions to 40 percent less than their 2005 levels. And here is the most startling sentence you'll read all day:

Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin deserves a lot of credit.

The West Virginia lawmaker, famously at odds with his party on many of its legislative priorities, had balked at supporting this one, too. In that, he was a doppelganger of Republicans like Sen. Lindsey Graham who feels that, while climate change is scary, it's not as scary as a bear market or bad jobs numbers. Graham recently huffed that, "I don't want to be lectured about what we need to do to destroy our economy in the name of climate change."

Never mind that the end of the world would also be pretty bad for business. In fact, never mind Lindsey Graham, because Manchin had an 11th-hour change of heart, positioning the United States to vault from climate laggard to climate leader, as it should have been all along.

This is the most important story in the world because it is the world. None of the other things that gobble our attention – Donald Trump, abortion rights, gun violence – matter as much as the inarguable fact that this planet is rapidly growing inhospitable to human life. That grim truth has hit like a hammer in recent days. Now, perhaps, we get to hit back.

It is not that those other things don't matter. But worrying about them presupposes a future. Last week offers hope that we may still have one.

Airlines got bailouts, we get flight delays. Where's Congress?

BY BRIAN WOODDELL



It was supposed to be a heavenly evening. Too bad it came after the day from hell.

My son graduated with his bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin at the tail end of the lockdown phase of the pandemic. A couple of years before, I had asked him what he wanted as a graduation gift: dinner at a Michelin three-star restaurant. I promised him when he eventually graduated that I'd make it happen—once we could.

A restaurant with that rating meant New York, California, Chicago or Washington, D.C. After looking at the options, I chose the last: The Inn at Little Washington, a French-American place an hour outside the district. This sort of restaurant is a financial commitment, and it's nonrefundable. To help offset the cost, I used American Airlines points to book the earliest flights of the day and made the

reservation for 8:45 p.m. that night, thinking that there was no way it would take 12 hours to get from Texas to northern Virginia.

I was wrong. My son's flights were fine. But once I arrived at LaGuardia Airport in New York for my layover, my flight was delayed, then restored, then delayed again, this time with a gate change. I had a gut feeling that it would take a miracle to get to D.C. that day.

In 2020, per the New York Times, the United States handed airlines \$25 billion to help them endure the pandemic. According to Business Traveler, American received \$4.1 billion, in addition to low-interest loans.

Despite this, flight cancellations in 2022 – a year that should be gangbusters for travel-related companies – might surpass those of 2020. Flight-Aware and Newsweek reported 121,918 cancellations through the end of June, about 500 more than all of 2021. The July 4 weekend added another 2,200 cancellations and tens of thousands of delays, according to the Associated Press. Travelers have heard

every excuse: ongoing pandemic problems, computer glitches, bad weather, fuel costs. And yes, things have been difficult for a while. But industries across the nation – many that didn't get \$25 billion to keep going – have figured out how to adapt. Why not the airlines? How is an industry in which a substantial number of customers signal their intentions months in advance failing to keep up with demand?

Meanwhile, people are being harmed. Flight crews don't deserve the stress that delays and cancellations involve. On all three of my flights during my last trip, I heard at least one flight attendant or pilot nearly beg passengers to be patient and not take out their frustrations on the crew.

As for passengers, they're enduring long lines and constant changes. Not every passenger has the know-how or means to modify plans at the last second or navigate the complicated re-booking process. Not every passenger is a business traveler who can charge an emergency dinner and hotel room to the company card. Everyday Americans are

missing concerts, weddings, reunions and funerals. These are college students who finally saved up enough to backpack in Europe and families that are taking their first vacations in years.

My story ended well. A \$161 Amtrak ticket got me from Manhattan to D.C. with plenty of time to spare. I didn't try to re-book through American because, frankly, the airline had lost my trust. I needed to know for certain that I was going to make it in time.

My flight was canceled so late in the day that I would have missed our reservation. That cancellation could have made me miss one of the best evenings my son and I ever had.

None of this headache ever needed to happen, though. The airlines know the number of passengers booked and planes and crews needed. They know the ebb and flow of the travel season. This summer shouldn't have caught them by surprise.

It's time for Congress and the Department of Transportation to make the airlines sweat. We need hearings and regulations. We need expanded passenger rights. And we need more competition – specifically in the form of increased clean, efficient rail transit options.

We the travelers handed the airlines a check for \$25 billion. It's time for us to demand a return for our investment.

Brian Wooddell is a public educator from Fort Worth.

Blame doctors' pandemic policies for part of drop in kids getting vaccines

BY CYNTHIA M. ALLEN
cmallen@star-telegram.com



I'm not alone when I confess that the COVID era wreaked havoc on my kids' annual pediatrician visits.

In the early months of the pandemic, when the virus was still a big unknown and doctors' offices were trying to limit contacts, our long-scheduled well-check visits were all canceled by our doctors. Later, pediatric office

policies that allowed only one parent to accompany one child per visit, made going to the doctor a nearly impossible task.

It often required a babysitter or some other form of hard-to-find child care, and that typically meant those appointments also needed to be rescheduled at least once. And every parent knows that many of these visits need to be set many months in advance.

Even three years later, the insistence by some medical offices that we wrangle a screaming toddler into an all-but-useless face covering has made going to the doctor as daunting for the parent as the child and understandably something we might want to delay.

But pandemic-era doctors' appointments that were missed or repeatedly delayed often meant that for many kids, vaccines for ordinary childhood illness were, too.

That was predictable and understandable. And vaccination rates have largely rebounded as the pandemic has waned. That's a good thing.

If there's any decline or stagnation in the rate of children who are up-to-date on their normal vaccine schedule, doctors are quick to blame an increase in vaccine hesitancy driven by misinformation and questions about the COVID-19 vaccine – which has had remarkably slow uptake for the youngest kids.

They cast aspersions on ignorant parents and social media misinformation campaigns. But they seldom acknowledge their own role in creating an environment in which parents are increasingly wary about the accuracy of the information they are receiving from health care professionals.

They seem to have memory-holed the months of public health officials telling us things that ended up not being true.

Like the initial claims that the vaccines prevented infection and stopped the spread of COVID. The vaccines prevented serious illness and hospitalization and minimized, but did not stop, contagiousness.

Now, they are finally acknowledging that the likelihood of contracting COVID, even after four shots, is probably inevitable, a fact punctuated by

President Joe Biden's recent bout with illness.

The president, whose age makes him high-risk (unlike most children), thankfully appears to have weathered COVID without incident. But there is no way of knowing for certain if that was a function of his many vaccine shots, use of the drug Paxlovid or the mild nature of the variant he contracted.

The continued insistence of public health officials that masking and ever-more boosters are needed to end the spread of a virus that most of us have had and survived has a hollowness that rightly makes people more skeptical of the medical information we are receiving.

And that skepticism has understandably trickled down into the daily medical choices we make,

even things such as traditional childhood vaccines that never once gave most of us a second thought.

As the recent revelatory review by University College London which pushed back on long-held belief that depression is caused by a serotonin imbalance in the brain has demonstrated, medical knowledge is in constant flux.

Science, as they say, is seldom settled, and doctors and health officials would better serve the public by regularly saying so.

It would be good for doctors and parents to have a more open and honest dialogue about even routine medical practices and procedures.

It would certainly increase my confidence in getting our well-check appointments back on the calendar.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

OUR MISSION: ENGAGE. INFORM. EMPOWER.

Steve Coffman
President and Editor

Amon G. Carter
Founder-Publisher, 1906-1955
Amon G. Carter Jr.
Publisher, 1955-1982

Editorial Board members:
Ryan J. Rusk, opinion editor
Steve Coffman, president and editor
Cynthia M. Allen, columnist
Bud Kennedy, columnist
Nicole Russell, opinion writer

Opinion content from syndicated sources may be trimmed to fit available space.
Letters to the Editor: Letters should be no longer than 150 words and must include a full name, home street address, city of residence and phone number for verification. Letters will be edited. Writers are limited to one letter every 30 days.
E-mail (preferred): letters@star-telegram.com; Fax: 817-390-7688
Customer Service: 800-776-STAR (7827) or customerservice@star-telegram.com
Regular mail: Letters to the Editor, Box 1870, Fort Worth TX 76101
The editorials are the opinions of the Star-Telegram as determined by members of the editorial board. All other views – cartoons, letters to the editor and columns – are the opinions of the individual writers and artists.