# **Passenger Forcibly Removed From United Flight, Prompting Outcry**

April 10, 201712:50 PM ET (Article from npr.org)

**Updated at 6:11 p.m. ET**

Passengers on a United Express flight from Chicago to Louisville, Ky., were horrified when a man was forcibly removed — violently wrenched from his seat and physically dragged down the aisle — apparently to clear a seat for airline staff. Videos of the scene have prompted calls to boycott United Airlines.

On Twitter, a representative of the United [said](https://twitter.com/united/status/851383383888285696) the flight in question was "overbooked" and that "one customer refused to leave."

"This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United," company CEO Oscar Munoz later said in [a statement](http://newsroom.united.com/news-releases?item=124753). "I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers."

He said the airline is conducting a "detailed review" of what happened and reaching out to the passenger in question, who was left bloodied.

The Chicago Department of Aviation, meanwhile, says the actions of the security officers were "not condoned by the Department" and that one individual has been placed on leave pending a review.

Airlines are legally allowed to remove passengers from flights for nearly any reason — including to vacate a seat for someone else. But the method shown on these videos is not typical. One aviation expert tells NPR that the scene on Flight 4311 was "extremely unusual."

Multiple videos and photos were posted on social media, and other passengers described the incident online — at first upset about the delay, and then horrified by the violent turn of events.

[**Emily Powell** @Powell\_Emily](https://twitter.com/Powell_Emily)

[@united](https://twitter.com/united) flight 3411 is forcing people off the plane bc 4 crew members need a ride [@CNN](https://twitter.com/CNN) [@NBCNews](https://twitter.com/NBCNews)

[7:25 PM - Apr 9, 2017](https://twitter.com/Powell_Emily/status/851214406621032448)· [Chicago, IL](https://twitter.com/search?q=place%3A1d9a5370a355ab0c)

Witnesses say passengers had already boarded on Sunday evening at O'Hare International Airport when United asked for volunteers to take another flight the next day to make room for four United staff members who needed seats.

The airline offered $400 and a free hotel, passenger Audra D. Bridges [told](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2017/04/10/video-shows-man-forcibly-removed-united-flight-chicago-louisville/100274374/?from=global&sessionKey&autologin) the Louisville Courier-Journal. When no one volunteered, the offer was doubled to $800. When there were still no bites, the airline selected four passengers to leave the flight — including the man in the video and his wife.

"They told him he had been selected randomly to be taken off the flight," Bridges [said on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/audra.dickerson/posts/10104378189569930?comment_id=10104378227943030&reply_comment_id=10104378234000890&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D). She said there was no incident involving the man until he was told to give up his seat.

The man said he was a doctor and that he "needed to work at the hospital the next day," passenger Jayse D. Anspach [said on Twitter](https://twitter.com/JayseDavid/status/851258828763148288).

"He said he wasn't going to [get off the plane]," Bridges wrote on Facebook. "He was talking to his lawyer on the phone."

Then United brought in security.

[**Jayse D. Anspach** @JayseDavid](https://twitter.com/JayseDavid)

[@United](https://twitter.com/united) overbook [#flight3411](https://twitter.com/hashtag/flight3411?src=hash) and decided to force random passengers off the plane. Here's how they did it:

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](https://support.twitter.com/articles/20175256)

Both Bridges and Anspach posted videos of three security officers, who appear to be wearing the uniforms of Chicago aviation police, wrenching the man out of his seat, prompting wails. His face appeared to strike an armrest. Then they dragged his limp body down the aisle.

Footage shows the man was bleeding from the mouth as they dragged him away. His glasses were askew and his shirt was riding up over his belly.

"It looked like he was knocked out, because he went limp and quiet and they dragged him out of the plane like a rag doll," Anspach [wrote](https://twitter.com/JayseDavid/status/851260528437727232).

"10mins later, the doctor runs back into the plane with a bloody face, clings to a post in the back, chanting, 'I need to go home,' " [he said.](https://twitter.com/JayseDavid/status/851261487121285120)

"[@united](https://twitter.com/united) has everyone on this flight fully distressed and fearful!!" @JohnK tweeted. He later sent out an update: "Just asked to leave plane so they can clean up blood from passenger."

After the cleanup, the passengers were allowed to reboard and fly to Louisville.

The Courier-Journal [spoke with Bridges](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2017/04/10/video-shows-man-forcibly-removed-united-flight-chicago-louisville/100274374/?from=global&sessionKey&autologin) about the troubled flight. She told the newspaper the plane was ultimately delayed about two hours, with no update to passengers about what happened to the injured man.

### [**THE TWO-WAY**](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/)

### [**Outrage, Explanations After United Turns Away Girls From Flight For Wearing Leggings**](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/03/27/521649877/outrage-explanations-after-united-bans-girls-from-flight-for-wearing-leggings)

This is the second outrage-inducing United incident in just two weeks. On March 26, the airline [turned away girls wearing leggings](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/03/27/521649877/outrage-explanations-after-united-bans-girls-from-flight-for-wearing-leggings), later explaining that they were violating the fairly strict dress code for people flying on "buddy passes." The incident went viral, partly because of the airline's initial, unsatisfying attempts to justify what happened.

The same happened on Sunday, when United's first response to the outrage was to say that the passenger "refused to leave." It wasn't untrue — but it didn't address the violence shown on the video.

Christopher Elliott, a consumer advocate and founder of the group Travelers United, notes — without defending United's actions on this flight — that airlines have broad discretion to remove paying passengers from planes.

"He wasn't leaving his seat, therefore he was uncooperative, therefore he was considered disruptive and they removed him," Elliott says. "The legal agreement between you and the airline basically says, 'We can remove you at any time for any reason from one of our flights.' "

It happens "routinely," Elliott says. According to Department of Transportation numbers, some 46,000 people were "involuntarily denied boarding" by major airlines in 2015 — although Elliott notes that most of those people were denied boarding in the first place, not dragged off a plane.

And it doesn't mean those people misbehaved. It's perfectly legal for an airline to "overbook," or sell more tickets than it has, and then kick some unlucky travelers off the flight.

But it's "extremely unusual" for that to prompt the kind of response shown on the video, says Patrick Smith, an airline pilot and travel blogger behind the website "[Ask The Pilot](http://www.askthepilot.com/info-for-media/)."

He notes that airlines almost always offer money or a voucher and then increase the offer if no one is interested.

"Almost always, someone takes the bait and it doesn't come to this," Smith says. But in this case, while United started by offering payouts, the situation turned hostile.

"Technically, an airline has a right to eject a passenger. At a certain point someone has to get off the plane. How they do that is where it gets tricky," Smith said.

"I'm sure [United would be] the first to tell you that it was not handled as well as it should have been, and there were other options. ... it doesn't seem right to me."