

MICHAEL S. LEE
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CHIEF OF STAFF

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4404

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JOINT ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE

December 19, 2018

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretaries Chao, Pompeo, and Ross:

I write to express my support for a careful examination of Qatar's compliance with our Open Skies agreement.

Open Skies agreements promote a free market environment within international aviation by eliminating government intervention, promoting market competition, and increasing consumer choice. Efforts by foreign governments to either subsidize or provide other benefits to their air carriers can create severe market distortions and cause harm to American carriers and consumers.

I commend the Trump Administration for its recent efforts to negotiate an agreement with the Qatari government that would bring greater financial transparency requirements, including the disclosure of financial transactions with state entities. These are important commitments in light of the long-standing concern that the Qatari government has been subsidizing Qatar Airways in violation of our Open Skies agreement.

Unfortunately, compliance with this agreement has come into question. Reports indicate that Qatar Airways recently acquired a 49 percent interest in Air Italy, which vastly expanded Air Italy's international aviation operations. The concern that the Qatari government has been subsidizing Qatar Airways now raises appropriate questions over whether Qatar Airways' recent investment in Air Italy is actually subsidized support from the Qatari government. In other words, Qatar Airways' recent acquisition of Air Italy raises a healthy skepticism that Qatar is complying with all obligations under our Open Skies agreement.

Therefore, I respectfully request that you investigate these recent events, determine whether such actions are consistent with Qatar's obligations under our Open Skies agreement, and ensure that there is full compliance with all obligations under our Open Skies agreement.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Lee", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Lee
United States Senator