

US Airways Aircraft Turn Into Flying Vending Machines

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As the airline industry continues to be dominated by high fuel prices and passengers face a multitude of fees and extra charges, US Airways management recently made the announcement to charge for non-alcoholic beverages in flight.

Beginning Friday, August 1, US Airways will start charging passengers \$2 for soft drinks and \$1 for coffee and hot tea. Flight attendants at US Airways and America West, represented by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA), are adamantly opposed to this unprecedented decision due to lack of proper planning and poor notification to passengers.

"Rather than charge the fare necessary to produce their product, management has chosen to resort to the tactics of ultra low fare carriers such as Allegiant Airlines and Irish carrier Ryanair," said US Airways AFA-CWA President Mike Flores. "This model resorts to a nickel and dime approach to the airlines most valuable asset -- the passengers. Flight attendants are trained and certified safety professionals, not cashiers to be used in management's futile attempt to bolster US Airways bottom line."

Exempt from the charge will be passengers traveling on transatlantic flights and on the US Airways Shuttle. Unaccompanied minors will also be exempt and those with medical conditions will be assessed by flight attendants and offered a free soft drink under what the airline calls "the good judgment of our flight attendants."

Lisa LeCarre, America West AFA-CWA President representing the Phoenix-based flight attendants of US Airways, reiterated the concerns brought forward to management saying, "Selling these items detracts from the focus on safety for both passengers and crew. While we understand management's intent to add revenue, this program will put both flight attendants and passengers in a 'no win' situation proven by the myriad of problems arising from the Buy-Onboard program currently in place."

The carrier's current onboard purchasing has already been plagued by issues such as of lack of inventory, inadequate money change and an unsatisfactory product selection for passengers, adding to additional frustration from an already irritated traveling public. Management plans to install handheld credit card readers sometime in 2009.

"In the current industry of customer frustration, the last thing flight attendants want to do is add fuel to the fire," said LeCarre.

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