**Airline Quality Rating Expert Comments on The Pandemic: 'This Changes Everything in The Way We Fly'**

**Dr. Dean Headley, Wichita State University**

**Air travel is at its lowest level since the 1960s. What can the flying public expect in the months to come as we try to return to normal?**

“It's certainly unprecedented. Not even 9/11 took us down this far. The airline industry took about 20% of the seat capacity out of service following 9/11. Now, we've got about 90% of the domestic seat capacity not flying, which is a dramatically different position to recover from as we begin to fly again. It took about two years for the industry to reach full flight capacity after 9/11, so I would expect something similar with this crisis. Airlines and travelers are being cautious and for good reason. And I think they will continue to be cautious about the return to flying and keep the public’s interest in mind.

“This recovery will certainly take longer than the 9/11 recovery. The big change we saw after 9/11 was TSA and screening and being overly cautious about who was let on an airplane. How do we do that after the coronavirus? I don't know that we've really figured that one out yet. So that's going to add additional time – months certainly, if not maybe years – before this gets back to normal.”

**How is the coronavirus impact different from the impact of 9/11?**

“I think the biggest difference is the nature of the fear. It is very difficult to put a face on what we should be cautious about with coronavirus. It's our spouse, our neighbor. It's a doorknob. It's a seat in an airplane. It can be anywhere. It's faceless. It is hard to see until it is too late. The fear that kept people from flying after 9/11 is different than the fear we have with this coronavirus.”

**What will the airline industry look like after this coronavirus pandemic?**

“It's possible that some airlines could go under. But we don't have that many to go under, quite frankly. Since 9/11, we've had a lot of consolidation, so to speak. I don't know how much more consolidation, bankruptcy or going out of existence of airlines that this country can stand or that the flying public will tolerate. Choice is something that Americans tend to like, and right now we have a lot of choice in air travel for the most part. And if we start losing airlines, I'm not sure how the flying public's really going like that. Consumers will still fly, but this has seriously changed the way our country will function for a long time to come and air travel is a big part of that changed attitude.

“Some of the change is going to be good, though. I mean, let's face it, people are a lot more caring and giving and understanding and appreciative, and there's a lot of good things there. But at the same token, there's going to be a lot of hesitation about re-engaging in the way that our American ‘do what we want to do when we want to do it’ type of attitude has been in the past.”

**Looking to the future, what changes might your average traveler – the person who flies maybe two or three times a year – see in the airline industry?**

“The starting of TSA was the result of efforts to make air travel safe after 9/11. It's hard to say what role TSA security will play in response to the coronavirus. They screen for explosives, but how do we screen for the coronavirus I any timely way? I'm not sure they can do the health screening that may be required. There may be some type of a health question that they ask. I could see that being possible, particularly if this virus lingers or comes back over and over again in various countries that maybe aren't quite as quick to recognize or control its reoccurrence.

“But let's face it, we like to move around the country and the world, and anything that limits our movement seems a little bit out of reason to our American way of life. It is going to take a while for the flying public to warm up to any further intrusions into our flying habits, both domestically and internationally. How long did it take us to get used to the TSA? Taking off your shoes, belt, coat, emptying your carry-on suitcase and being patted down are now common, but these moves won’t help with the coronavirus. I expect the TSA will continue to play a role somehow in the screening of the traveling public that travel in the U.S. and to and from other countries. TSA and other countries equivalents are going to be front and center in this new global challenge for all travelers”.

**Some final thoughts.**

“Be encouraged by all that is being done to bring this coronavirus under control. This crisis will pass, but it will change the flying experience as well as our daily lives. Just like 9/11 changed the way we flew and used the air travel system; this coronavirus will change the global air travel system as well. It's hard to say exactly how at this point. I think one thing this has taught us is that … literally, the world is interconnected, and we must be aware of what's going on all around us. Travelers must be informed and be prepared to take care of themselves. Whether it's a glitch in a reservation or a missed connection or a health issue, you must be prepared to take care of yourself because while the airlines try their best, they can't do that for you. You must be responsible for your own outcomes as much as possible. Do not act out of fear, but act from a sense of personal responsibility for yourself and those around you.”