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Cramming Passengers on Planes Is Not Just Uncomfortable, It's Also Unsafe: Cameron on Transportation

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I hate to fly. It's mostly an irrational fear of turbulence and crashing — little stuff like that. But in recent years, the whole experience of air travel has turned from uncomfortable to unbearable.

Getting to the airport is expensive and slow. LaGuardia Airport is a complete mess with construction. Arriving there two-plus hours before departure seems like such a waste of time, until you encounter the long check-in lines and TSA inspections.

But what really bugs me about air travel is getting crammed onto a plane with little room to move and then enduring my fellow passengers' behavior like caged animals. Those conditions really bring out the best in

us, don't they?

Enough has been written about recent air-rage incidents and airlines dragging passengers off over-booked flights. But the issue goes beyond discomfort to a question of real safety.

U.S. Sen. [Richard Blumenthal](#) has co-sponsored the [SEAT Act](#), or "Seat Egress in Air Travel" Act. The bill would force the [FAA](#) to provide minimum standards for seat width and pitch (the distance between rows). If passed, it would stop airlines from cramming more seats on already crowded planes.

The proposal has less of a chance of passage than I have of getting a free upgrade to first class, but at least somebody is finally talking about "the 300-pound gorilla" sitting next to me in coach: There are just too many people crammed onto airplanes.

The FAA requires aircraft manufacturers to prove they can [evacuate a full flight in 90 seconds](#) with half of the exits blocked. Of course, these certification tests are done with company staff who know what's going to happen (an escape drill) and what's on the line (their jobs).

But that's not how emergencies happen in real life, so I don't trust those tests. Evacuating a full A-380 with 873 passengers of all ages, some of them drunk or disabled or grabbing their laptops, is not the game I want to play.

The global airline industry is expected to make a profit of [\\$30 billion](#) this year on record passenger loads. Some of the most popular airlines have the lowest fares because they cram the most possible passengers onto every flight.

To me, this sounds like a disaster in the making. But given the FAA's shoddy record on aviation safety, it's not surprising. They are more of a cheerleader for the industry they regulate than watchdog.

It will probably take an otherwise survivable crash that could not be evacuated in time to spur change. We are a nation that seems to lurch from crisis to crisis, though simple preventatives are right in front of us.

Meantime, good luck this summer traveling in coach. Better read that seat-back safety card and watch the evacuation demonstration as you curl into your seat for that six-hour flight.

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As for me, I'll be traveling on Amtrak and stretching my legs.

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