

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 6, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken:

As members of the Congressional Friends of the Dominican Republic Caucus, we write on behalf of our numerous Dominican American constituents to express our support for the ongoing negotiations for a renewed United States-Dominican Republic (US-DR) Open Skies Agreement and to encourage the Administration to finalize this agreement. This effort is in addition to two previous letters sent by Caucus Chairman Espaillat in 2023.

Proudly, the United States and the Dominican Republic first entered into an Air Transport Agreement in 1949. Since then, the United States updated its Open Skies Agreements program, which significantly expanded the scope of benefits afforded to carriers and customers under these agreements. As things stand, the Dominican Republic does not yet have a modernized Open Skies Agreement with the United States. Fortunately, we are at a critical juncture where both countries are engaged in negotiations to complete such an agreement, and we respectfully request that you continue to prioritize this important agreement's finalization on behalf of our constituents and their families.

Many of us are Members of Congress who represent districts with large and vibrant Dominican American communities. As such, our constituents have regularly expressed their frustration with the current state of limited flight routes and exorbitant prices on flights from the United States to the Dominican Republic, which often prevent them from traveling to visit their family and loved ones. However, with a modernized Open Skies Agreement in place with the United States, Dominican airlines would no longer have restrictions on where they can fly to in the United States, and both U.S. and Dominican travelers would enjoy new flight options, lower fares, and better service among more airlines in the market.

In the interim, lower airfares for our constituents are desperately needed, as flight prices to the Dominican Republic and back have reached unprecedented levels due to limited competition amongst airlines and limited flight routes. These high prices have proved especially daunting during peak travel seasons, such as the summer and winter holidays, which are often the only times when families with school-age children are able to travel. A quick Google search reveals that a round trip ticket from JFK to the Dominican Republic or vice versa during this December's holiday season often costs upwards of \$1,000 to \$2,000 per head—a price point which has unfortunately remained steady even for families that have attempted to book their travel in advance. These types of prices are merely a microcosm of our constituents' experiences

over the past few years when attempting to travel to and from the Dominican Republic. Additionally, these types of thousand-dollar prices often prove prohibitively expensive for families with children and often prevent them from visiting their loved ones in the Caribbean altogether. In contrast, completing a modernized US-DR Open Skies Agreement would extend an economic lifeline to these deserving families who wish to travel to and from their nation of origin.

In addition to being beneficial for travelers, we feel that a modernized US-DR Open Skies Agreement would further strengthen the U.S.'s bond with an important Western Hemisphere ally in the Dominican Republic and provide major bilateral benefits, including increased trade opportunities and tourism. Should this agreement be completed, the potential to foster economic growth for aviation service companies—as well as for airlines, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses—would provide a significant boon to local workers and economies in both the U.S. and the Dominican Republic.

In closing, we appreciate both of your respective leadership efforts on this important issue and express our unified support for a final U.S.-Dominican Republic Open Skies Agreement that fulfills the standards set out under U.S. law, including airside safety, workers' rights, and competitiveness. We respectfully ask that our request receives full and fair consideration with all applicable rules and regulations set forth by the appropriate decision making agencies.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



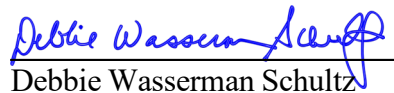
María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress


Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Ave SE, Washington, DC 20590

Ben Taylor, Director, Office of International Aviation, U.S. Department of Transportation, 1200 New Jersey Ave SE, Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Luis Abinader, President of the Dominican Republic, The National Palace, Avenue México, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic