

FEATURES

Autistic aviation enthusiast sparks viral bid to rebuild Spirit Airlines



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A grassroots effort to resurrect Spirit Airlines has gone viral after being launched by Hunter Peterson, an aviation enthusiast who has spoken publicly about being autistic and his lifelong interest in airplanes.

The campaign, organized through LetsBuySpiritAir.com, calls for a “community-owned airline” model in which passengers, employees and supporters would collectively fund and govern a rebooted version of the bankrupt budget carrier. The proposal spread quickly across TikTok, Reddit and X, drawing millions of views under the hashtag #Spirit2.0.

Peterson, 24, a content creator, gained attention after posting a video last week in which he said, “I’m kind of autistic, and I kind of like airplanes,” while explaining his knowledge of Spirit’s fleet and bankruptcy filings. The clip has been viewed more than 6 million times.

Aviation communities online have framed the campaign as an example of how neurodivergent people often develop deep specialist interests. On Reddit and Threads, users called the effort “a hyperfixation turned into a business movement.”

The website outlines a structure modeled in part on community-owned sports teams in the U.S. Supporters would contribute funds in exchange for membership units and voting rights on issues such as routes and fees. The stated goal is to maintain low base fares without relying on debt-driven expansion.

As of Tuesday, LetsBuySpiritAir.com reported more than 47,000 email sign-ups and \$1.1 million in pledged interest. No money is being collected, pending regulatory review.

Aviation analysts cautioned that restarting an airline faces significant hurdles, including Federal Aviation Administration recertification, aircraft leasing, insurance, staffing and airport gate access.

“Crowdfunding sentiment doesn’t pay for A320neo leases,” said Henry Harteveltdt, president of Atmosphere Research Group. “But the level of public engagement is notable. Spirit’s brand still has recognition, and there is frustration over fare structures in the market.”

Spirit Airlines filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2024 and ceased operations earlier this year. The FAA and Spirit’s bankruptcy trustee did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Peterson said in a livestream Sunday that the next step is forming an exploratory committee with aviation lawyers and former Spirit employees.

“I just really love airplanes,” Peterson said. “If this ends at a Discord and some cool merch, that’s still more than I had last week.”



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