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Avelo Airlines withdraws from ICE deportation operations, closes Mesa Gateway base | Arizona Mirror

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Avelo Airlines ending ICE deportation flights at Mesa Gateway Airport, citing inconsistent revenue from federal program



Avelo Airlines, a subcontractor for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's deportation efforts, will be ending its participation in the program at Mesa Gateway airport and across the country citing unpredictable and inconsistent revenue.

Arizona, and specifically Mesa Gateway Airport, play a crucial role in ICE's ramping up of aerial deportation efforts. The airport is home to the agency's headquarters for its "ICE Air" operations, which uses subcontractors and subleases to disguise deportation aircraft. Avelo is one of those subcontractors that works under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security charter program.

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Avelo Airlines spokeswoman Courtney Goff told the Arizona Mirror that the company will be closing its Mesa Gateway base of operations on Jan. 27.

"The program provided short-term benefits but ultimately did not deliver enough consistent and predictable revenue to overcome its operational complexity and costs," Goff said.

The airline has been sharply criticized for participating in the program, and has removed its livery from its aircraft and painted them all white amid protests at airports hosting the program and the airline.

But Avelo isn't the only game in town, and the company is actually working for someone else.

Contracts to conduct deportation flights are lucrative for the companies involved. The Project on Government Oversight has reported that CSI

Aviation, whose corporate director was one of President Donald Trump's "fake electors" in New Mexico, was awarded a no-bid contract for \$128 million.

A letter provided to the Mirror by a Chandler resident who asked the airport to stop working with Avelo Airlines shed further light on who exactly is flying people in and out of Mesa Gateway Airport and the ICE detention facility there.

"Gatewaay Airport DOES NOT have an airline operating agreement with Avelo Airlines, and Avelo DOES NOT offer commercial passenger flights at the Airport," J. Brian O'Neill, the airport's executive director and CEO, said in an email. "Avelo operates soley (sic) as a charter aircraft sub-contractor for CSI Aviation, a company that works with the federal government on repatriation efforts."

CSI Aviation mostly uses subcontractors to conduct many of its flights, with companies like GlobalX doing the vast majority of the work.

Late last year, an Avelo airplane was struck by a stray bullet during a shootout between Mesa police officers and a suspect at the airport. ICE said that the bullet impact did not impact the aircraft's ability to fly and it is unclear whose bullet hit the plane.

Questions still remain though on what may be happening to Avelo's fleet.

DHS recently announced it will buy six Boeing 737s to create its own deportation fleet and entered into a contract with a company called Daedalus Aviation for the aircraft.

Online researchers have pointed out that the aircraft that are now registered to Daedalus Aviation previously belonged to Avelo. The company did not respond to repeated requests for comment asking if it was connected to Daedalus Aviation.

"ICE never contracted directly with Avelo Airlines," the agency said in a statement to the Mirror. "ICE will continue to utilize its contracted service provider, which works with multiple airlines to support the American people's mandate for mass deportations of criminal illegal aliens."

Local advocates who have been protesting the deportation aircraft applauded the news but remained skeptical.

"While we welcome the decision to close Avelo's base at Mesa Gateway — a development that removes a major target from our advocacy agenda — we remain cautious," Meagan O'Connor, co-founder of Mesa Indivisible, told the Mirror. "Regardless, Mesa Valley Indivisible will continue to oppose the detention and trafficking of individuals for profit, challenge the private-prison industrial complex, and advocate for the full release of the unredacted Epstein files despite the current administration's drastic attempts to distract us from them."

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