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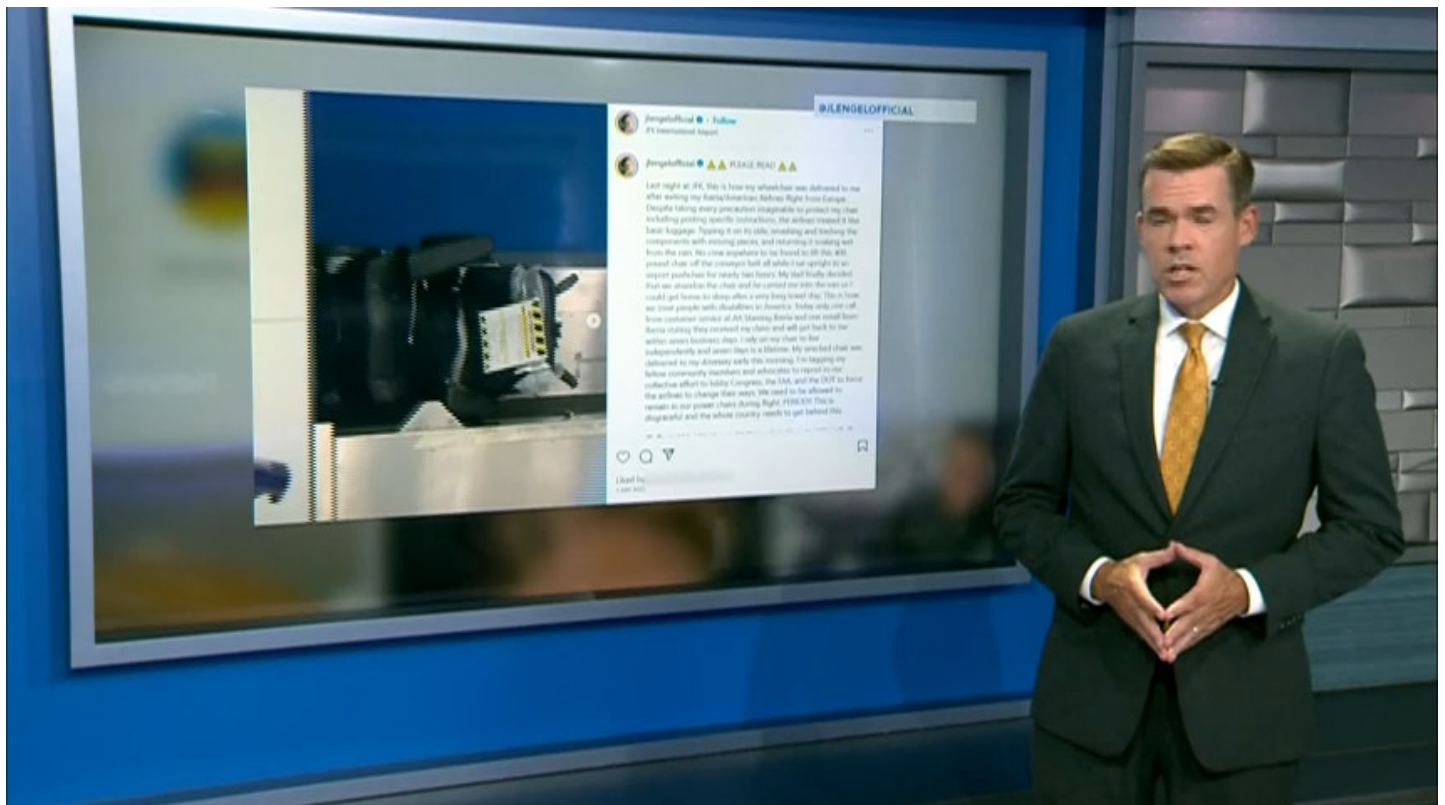
THE REAL DEAL

BE WELL

NJ actor Jonathan Lengel says American Airlines damaged his custom-made wheelchair

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By: **Matt Trapani** and **Kimberly Kravitz**



A teenage actor from New Jersey who uses a wheelchair says that the custom chair was manhandled and damaged at John F. Kennedy International Airport on Monday. Jonathan

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The 17-year-old suffers from muscular dystrophy and cannot be without his chair. He says that he and his family arrived home from Spain to find the \$40,000 chair damaged on its side on the conveyor belt and soaking wet.

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“This is how I got my wheelchair. This is a 400-pound electric custom wheelchair, built for me,” Lengel said in a video posted online.

News 12 New Jersey spoke with Erin Hawley, who also uses a wheelchair to get around. She says that she has no plans on ever being on a plane due to the lack of accessibility for those with special needs.

“They should definitely replace the chair in a timely fashion because it really takes a very long time to get your chair. That's not great for your physical health or your mental health,” she says.

Jim Raffone has a son with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. He dedicates his entire life to his foundation, Jar of Hope. He says he will be the one to get Lengel a new wheelchair if the airlines aren't responding to him.

does not want to take liability for a wheelchair that's
I run a race, raise money for this child – this family – if
s.

Easterseals National Office lobbies for better accessibility for those with special needs. President Kendra Davenport is advocating for heightened awareness and what airlines can do to prevent situations like this from happening.

“For someone who relies on a wheelchair to live, to move around, it's like you or me having something happen to our legs,” Davenport says.

News 12 New Jersey has reached out to American Airlines and Iberian Airlines for comment on the situation but did not hear back.

“American Airlines, Iberian Airlines, do better. This is just not OK,” Lengel said.

Lengel also stated that his family was forced to abandon the wheelchair and his dad had to carry him out of the airport. He went on to say that "the seven days" Iberia Airlines said they will need to return his messages, is like a lifetime.

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