

## Insta-CoGo: Skycaps, Tipping and You

By Cindy Loose | May 6, 2008

The income of skycaps who check bags at curbside is said to have **dropped drastically when many airlines began charging \$2 a bag for checking at curbside.**

The workers depend on tips, with salaries generally at minimum wage or less. According to testimony in a recent lawsuit, many passengers stopped tipping, or tipped less, when the airlines started charging the fee.

**Imagine what will happen now that passengers at curbside will be charged \$25 to check a second bag.** (The charge applies to most domestic economy fares even if you check your bags at the counter, but the point is that if you check at curbside, that's where you'll have to come up with the \$25 for a second bag. If paying \$2 made people unwilling to tip, paying \$27 is probably going to make their wallets freeze.)

A Bostonian is on the case. The lawyer, whom the skycaps call Sledgehammer Shannon, last month won a case against [American](#) on behalf of nine skycaps who said their income plummeted after American started charging the \$2 fee. The skycaps, all from Boston, were earning \$5.15 a hour, so a drop in tips was a huge deal. Jurors awarded the group a total of \$325,000.

Sledgehammer Shannon, aka Shannon Liss-Riordan, 38, told me yesterday that she plans to try to certify the skycaps as a class and bring suits on their behalf against American, United, US Airways, Alaska, Jet Blue, Northwest and Delta, which this month incidentally **imposed a \$3 fee for curbside check-in.**

The suit will seek to end the fee and ask that skycaps be awarded tips lost since the baggage fee began. Shannon says there are potentially thousands of plaintiffs and millions of dollars at stake. Discovery in the first trial, Shannon says, showed that in the first year of collecting the fee, American alone **brought in \$8 million**, \$2 at a time.

I can't help but wonder: How many of those who stopped tipping did so knowing that the \$2 was going to the airline, not the little guy? And did those who chose not to tip know that the little guy was earning minimum wage *or less* without tips?

But I also wonder: Can a court order an airline not to charge a fee it wants to charge?