

March 11, 2013

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta,

We understand that the sequestration mandate presented the Federal Aviation Administration with no good options for across-the-board spending reductions. That said, the FAA has announced sequestration cuts that will disproportionately affect the safety and integrity of general aviation operations.

If allowed to go forward, the recommended cuts will have unacceptable consequences for the nation and the flying community. That is why, on behalf of the nearly 400,000 members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, we urge you to suspend the planned cuts while we, and others, call upon Congress and the Administration's budget officials to grant you the needed flexibility to make choices that will reduce spending without threatening the safety of our skies or disabling general aviation.

During a February 26 meeting with aviation industry representatives, the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) announced plans to close more than 200 control towers at general aviation airports around the country—a decision that officials of your own agency admitted will have a severe and disproportionate effect on general aviation. In addition, the FAA announced plans that would derail certification, allow the navigational system to deteriorate, and furlough most employees at least one day per pay period.

The FAA may not be aware of the collective and cumulative effect these cuts will have on general aviation. Combined with the Administration's repeated proposals to impose a \$100-per-flight user fee on general aviation and lengthen the depreciation schedule for business aircraft, we can only conclude that someone in the Administration is engaged in an all-out assault on general aviation.

Furthermore, a reduction in general aviation activity can have severe consequences for communities where the local airport is an important economic driver, creating a ripple effect with national implications. Surprisingly, the FAA has told us it does not intend to take this into account as it closes hundreds of towers across the country.

By supporting business, medical access, agriculture, law enforcement, and more, general aviation provides vital economic stimulus and essential services to thousands of communities. This alone should give the FAA reason to immediately suspend planned cuts and undertake a more comprehensive review of the impact of tower closures. Considerations should include the

mix of operations, overlying airspace, type of instrument procedures, and proximity to metroplex airspace.

It is also worth noting that in and near metroplexes, towers at smaller fields provide a measure of relief to larger airports serving commercial traffic. Closing such towers will impact the entire metroplex.

The FAA contract tower program is, without question, one of the most cost-effective and successful programs in the history of the agency. Contract towers handle approximately 28 percent of all air traffic control tower operations in the United States, but account for just 14 percent of the FAA's total tower operations budget. On average, a contract tower operates at one-third the cost of a federal control tower while achieving the same high level of safety. For these reasons alone, it is illogical to dismember this program in a budget reduction scenario.

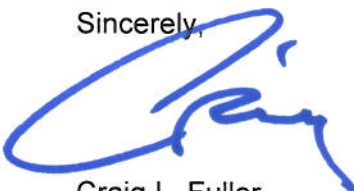
In addition to our concerns about tower closures, AOPA is alarmed by the operational and safety implications of further cuts to critical weather and flight services, aeromedical processes, and aircraft certification.

In the past, AOPA has suggested a number of cost-saving and cost-cutting initiatives that should be part of the current discussions. The expanded use of the driver's license medical, online aircraft registration, streamlining the CFI renewal process, and outsourcing the work of the FAA FAST team are just a few of the recommendations AOPA has championed in recent years.

A hallmark of your service at the FAA has been a willingness to fully appreciate the consequences of actions on all segments of the aviation community. As the FAA navigates the challenges of sequestration, we ask that you continue to work with AOPA and the entire community to identify options that do not place the burden of sequestration squarely on general aviation.

As part of our effort to seek Congressional action granting the FAA greater flexibility in implementing sequestration, we are sharing this letter with AOPA members, members of Congress, and the appropriate congressional committees. As always, we stand ready to work with you and your colleagues as this and other initiatives move forward.

Sincerely,



Craig L. Fuller