



April 23, 2007

The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Chairman
U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Mica
Ranking Member
U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
2313 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Member Mica:

On behalf of the family farmers and ranchers of the National Farmers Union (NFU), I am writing to express concern over proposed changes to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) budget that will have adverse effects on general aviation. The current tax system that funds FAA activity is set to expire on September 30, 2007. The FAA is proposing to replace their existing system with new taxes and fees that place an excessive financial burden on general aviation while simultaneously cutting funding to support rural airfields.

In rural communities, local airfields often provide the fastest and most efficient means of transportation. While big corporate airlines concentrate most of their service at only the nation's largest airports, nearly nineteen percent of the U.S. population relies on small airfields for transportation services. General aviation is a vital tool to bring emergency services such as transportation to medical facilities, search and rescue support and firefighting assistance to remote areas. In addition, local airfields are hubs of economic activity and bring millions of dollars annually to rural communities. There is no doubt that access to general aviation services contributes greatly to the quality of life for rural Americans.

The new FAA budget proposal shifts the burden of funding the FAA away from big airlines and towards general aviation. The FAA is proposing to levee new user fees on general aviation while decreasing taxes for big airlines. The current tax on aviation fuel is set to increase nearly four-fold, which would place a disproportionate burden on small air carriers who fly with fewer passengers and operate with slim margins. Small airfields and general aviation users already pay their fair share of aviation taxes and cannot afford these new fees. The FAA budget proposal also cuts funding for the Essential Air Services Program and the Airport Improvement Program, both of which are vital to maintaining the integrity of small airfields. General aviation is important to the health of rural communities. Local airfields stimulate economic activity and provide the countryside with essential services. The proposed changes to the FAA budget will compromise general aviation and have a significant negative impact on rural communities.

Again, I urge you to resist changes to FAA budget administration. I look forward to working with you and the committee to ensure rural local airfields and general aviation have a strong and vibrant future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Buis", written in a cursive style.

Tom Buis, President
National Farmers Union

Cc. Chairman Jerry Costello and Ranking Member Thomas Petri, Subcommittee on Aviation.