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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

RICHARD J. KESSLER, STAFF DIRECTOR
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April 24, 2013

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

Sequestration has been in effect for 54 days and it has been 49 days since I first wrote regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) plan for implementing sequestration. To date, no substantive response to those concerns has been provided. On March 21, 2013, the Department of Transportation provided an interim response simply stating that a full response was forthcoming.¹ Since that time, no response has been received despite several follow up requests.

Over the last few days, FAA engaged in a full blown media rollout for furlough-related flight delays, pitching stories to the press and even putting up an interactive online tool to generate unnecessary hype surrounding the flight delays. When sequestration went into effect, some worried that *every* problem our nation faced would be blamed on the sequester, no matter how loosely related. Now, it appears that the FAA is doing its best to ensure that sequestration is the scapegoat for every flight delay for the rest of the fiscal year.

FAA claims that it has no choice but to furlough most of its 47,000 employees, including some 15,000 air traffic controllers for one day every two weeks. FAA has made dire predictions that flights at the nation's busiest airports could be delayed by more than three hours as a direct result of these furloughs. Yet on Monday, one of the busiest travel days of the week, reports of the impact of these furloughs were mixed. Some found drastic flight delays; however, National Public Radio reported that there were no noticeable delays, save a few caused by weather delays.²

¹ Mar. 21, 2013 letter from the Assistant Secretary from Governmental Affairs. See attached.

² Worst-Case Avoided: Few Airports Link Delays To FAA Furloughs, Apr. 22, 2013, *available at* <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/04/22/178408691/airline-customers-watch-for-delays-as-furloughs-hit-faa-workers>

Regardless of whether these furloughs *actually* end up impacting travel, such a result would largely be the consequence of the failure to prioritize the convenience and safety of the traveling public over the politically motivated public relations campaign the department has undertaken.

FAA points to its personnel-intensive budget as the reason it must furlough all of its employees. This does not explain, however, why the 15,000 air traffic controllers *must* make up an equal part of the agency's furloughs. FAA has 32,000 employees that are *not* air traffic controllers.

The FAA employs a variety of lawyers, public affairs specialists, speechwriters, administrative staff, congressional affairs staff, community planners, management and program assistants, and other employees that aren't immediately critical to FAA's mission. With adequate planning, it should be possible for these employees to shoulder more of the burden of sequestration, with less of a burden on the time and safety of the American people.

There is no reason why a community planner or public relations specialist cannot undergo an additional furlough day every two weeks to offset the furlough day for an air traffic controller.

FAA's mission is to serve the traveling public and help keep them safe. It is time to refocus FAA's efforts on that mission.

In order to better understand FAA's decision making regarding sequestration please answer the following three requests and also provide a response to the seven unanswered requests from March 6:

- 1) Provide all emails sent to or from political appointees regarding the implementation of furloughs at FAA.
 - 2) Provide all emails sent to or from political appointees regarding flight delays related to sequestration or furloughs at FAA.
 - 3) Provide all emails from political appointees regarding FAA's response to OMB under the Sequestration Transparency Act of 2012.
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- 1) Provide a list, including costs, of all conferences sponsored by FAA in 2013.
- 2) Provide a list, including costs, of all speaking engagements by any FAA.
- 3) Provide a list, including costs, of all travel planned for the FAA administrator for 2013.
- 4) Provide FAA's total estimated expenditure on salaries for FY 2013 before and after sequestration.
- 5) Provide FAA's total estimated expenditure on salaries for air traffic controllers for FY 2013 before and after sequestration.
- 6) Provide a list with the title and salary for all FAA employees with the title public affairs specialist, speechwriter, public affairs assistant, press assistant, press secretary, deputy press secretary, communications director, external communications, internal communications, deputy communications director, and any other title related to communications and public affairs.
- 7) Provide a list with the title and salary for all FAA employees with the title management program assistant, historian, librarian, staff assistant, assistant, administrative assistant, confidential assistant, liaison, white house liaison, congressional liaison, and any other title related to administrative functions.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please provide a response no later than May 8, 2013. Please have your staff contact Patrick Bailey of my staff at (202) 224- 4751 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
Ranking Member



**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

Assistant Secretary
for Governmental Affairs

1200 New Jersey Ave., S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

March 21, 2013

The Honorable Tom A. Coburn, MD
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Dr. Coburn:

Thank you for your March 6, 2013 letter to Secretary LaHood. The Department is continuing to review your letter and requests for information. We will provide you with an additional response as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

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

Dana G. Gresham