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The Honorable Ray LaHood
Nominee, Secretary Department of Transportation
100 NE Monroe, Rm. 100
Peoria, IL 61602

Dear Congressman LaHood:

Congratulations on your nomination to serve as President Obama's Secretary of Transportation. On behalf of the more than 414,000 members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), almost three-quarters of the nation's pilots and aircraft owners, I want to express our enthusiasm in working with you in shaping aviation policy that improves safety and supports the air transportation system that is vital to the nation's economy. Your background in Congress as a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and its Aviation Subcommittee gives you a special insight into the aviation industry and many of the issues we face. Your understanding of the importance of the economic impact of aviation is especially important as you take on this leadership role.

Each year, general aviation (all flying other than military or commercial airlines) contributes more than \$150 billion to U.S. economic output, directly or indirectly, and employs nearly 1.3 million people whose collective annual earnings exceed \$53 billion. As you know, it reaches thousands of airports that are not served by commercial air service. Indeed, many remote communities would be nearly inaccessible were it not for their general aviation airport. Interestingly, in a poll conducted election night, more than 60% of Americans said they understood that general aviation is a vital part of America's transportation system.

Pilots, like most Americans are very concerned about the economy. In a recent survey, nearly 70% of AOPA members indicated they felt the current depressed economic conditions would prevail well into next year. Aviation was also adversely affected by this summer's spike in fuel prices, which resulted in a significant reduction in the amount of flying. As a pilot myself for over forty years, I appreciate what this means to all AOPA pilot members.

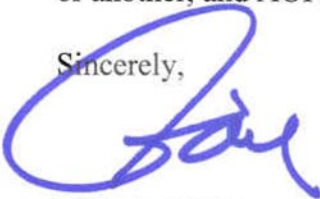
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That is why we were excited by your nomination. The aviation community needs your experience and thoughtful leadership to address the challenges of aviation safety, modernizing the nation's air traffic control system, long term financing of aviation infrastructure, and responding to energy and environmental issues. The Department plays a crucial role in serving as the general representative when other agencies and departments, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Homeland Security develop policy that affects aviation.

Your role is also important in unifying, not dividing, the aviation community as a foundation for the development of policies, planning for the future success and viability of the aviation industry. All of these underscore the need for an FAA Administrator that can work closely with you, has technical and people-management skills, labor relations capability combined with an understanding of the aviation industry, and has the political acumen necessary to lead the organization.

As I also take over my office of President of AOPA January 2009, on behalf of the 414,000 members of AOPA we look forward to working with you and members of your team to ensure the United States has the largest, safest, most efficient air transportation system in the world. It is a system on which we all rely in some form or another, and AOPA is ready to help make it even better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Craig', with a large, looping flourish at the end.

Craig L. Fuller