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t the start of 2013, Michael P. Huerta, then acting administrator of the FAA, was officially confirmed by the U.S. Senate as FAA administrator. Regarding Huerta's confirmation,

Capt. Lee Moak, ALPA's president, said, "Mr. Huerta's formidable transportation policy experience has already enabled him to achieve remarkable progress during his tenure as the FAA's acting administrator. ALPA is eager to continue this positive action at an accelerated pace to ensure the United States maintains a world-class air transportation system."

"With superbly qualified leadership, the FAA could not be more strongly positioned to engage with industry and labor to enhance the U.S. transportation system infrastructure and give U.S. airlines and their employees the opportunity to compete and prevail in the global marketplace."

Soon after his appointment, *Air Line Pilot*

posed several questions to Administrator Huerta to get his input on issues important to ALPA and its members.

Air Line Pilot: What are the greatest challenges facing your agency? What are your biggest opportunities?

Administrator Huerta: We all know that as an agency and an industry, there are significant challenges that we will face in the next five years. First, we need to take a tremendously safe aviation system to the next level of safety. This means making the system even safer by making it smarter and taking advantage of the growing amount of data we have to develop risk-based approaches.

We must also deliver NextGen—and we need to deliver benefits from technology and infrastructure, not just technology and infrastructure for their own sake. We've made tremendous progress in this but still have more to do. And improving the environmental sustainability of aviation is a big part of our



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An Interview With FAA Administrator Huerta

By ALPA Staff



collective challenge as well.

And we all know that we face a more difficult fiscal environment. This requires us to be creative and allow our employees to innovate so that we continue to attract and maintain a great workforce and improve our productivity and efficiency. At the same time, we need to be shaping the FAA of the future, so we are ready to address the demands that are coming our way. And in this environment, it remains critical that we play a key role in advancing global collaboration so that we improve safety, capacity, and sustainability around the world.

These challenges also present us with a great opportunity to make decisions that will influence aviation for decades to come. We have to tackle these challenges together.

Q While Congress passed a multiyear FAA reauthorization bill during 2012, the funding provided to the FAA was significantly less than requested; and with sequestration still looming, if Congress does not act, much of the budget for our government is still undefined. How will this affect the FAA, and how do you intend to address the situation and keep resources dedicated to the critical services FAA provides?

A We hope that Congress will reach a solution and avoid sequestration. Sequestration will require indiscriminate spending reductions to be made equally among the affected accounts, programs, projects, and activities within each account—severely restricting our ability to manage such large funding reductions. This will have serious effects on transportation services that are critical to the traveling public.

Sequestration would require the FAA to undergo a funding cut of more than \$600 million. This action would force the FAA to undergo an immediate retrenchment of core functions by reducing operating costs and eliminating or reducing services to various segments of the flying community. The safety of the aviation system is our highest priority, and we would undertake a risk-based approach to the reductions that we would need to take.

Given the magnitude of this reduction, it will be impossible to avoid significant employee furloughs and reductions in contracted services. On average, this means a vast majority of the FAA's nearly 47,000 employees will be furloughed for approximately one day per pay period until the end of the fiscal year in September, with a maximum of two days per pay period. Any furloughs would only occur after appropriate employee notification and in accordance with applicable collective bargaining agreements.

The furlough of a large number of air traffic

controllers and technicians would require a reduction in air traffic to a level that could be safely managed by the remaining staff. The result would be felt across the country, as the volume of travel would have to be decreased. Sequestration could slow air traffic levels in major cities, which would result in delays and disruptions across the country during the critical summer travel season.

Aviation safety employees also would experience significant furloughs that would affect airlines, individual pilots, and aviation manufacturers—all of which need FAA safety approvals and certifications. While the agency would continue to address identified safety risks, a slowed certification and approval process due to furloughs could negatively affect all segments of the airline industry, including passenger travel.

Apart from possible sequestration, the FAA does not have a budget for fiscal year 2013. Congress passed a continuing resolution that keeps the government running until March 27 at a rate equal to last year's budget. After March 27, we will need an approved budget or another continuing resolution to keep operating.

Q How will the FAA ensure it remains agile enough to keep pace with rapidly developing technology (e.g., composite materials, batteries, autoflight systems, space-based procedures, training delivery) that the agency will continue to regulate to ensure safety?

A As technology advances, our aircraft become more complex. This places a premium on transparency and communication between the FAA and those we regulate. We need to ensure the highest level of safety and to create the best methods and procedures.

It is essential for us to bring together the best minds and technical experts in aviation—both inside and outside government—to work on understanding how new systems and products function and how to continue establishing and meeting the highest safety standards.

The way to enhance safety is to keep the lines of communication open between business and government so that we foster the ability and willingness to share information in the pursuit of safety.

Q Other agencies under the Department of Transportation (DOT) have responsibilities for aviation. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is a great example as it regulates the transport of hazardous materials. Do you feel that there is enough cross talk and cross-agency coordination under



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the DOT on critical issues such as the carriage of hazardous materials on airplanes?

A The FAA is committed to ensuring that we do all the necessary coordination and collaboration with PHMSA on this issue. The carriage of hazardous materials touches many points in the aviation system, including cargo shipments, passengers' toiletries and medical and electronic devices, and aircraft systems and components such as fuel and oxygen. Safely transporting these materials requires cross talk among multiple agencies, offices within the FAA, airlines, and manufacturers. We attend regulatory meetings, participate in multifaceted operational efforts, and, above all, share data that can be used for making decisions, planning, and evaluating the effectiveness of our safety efforts. We believe this guides the DOT to effectively coordinate on the carriage of hazardous materials. And as we improve the data-sharing systems, we will continue to improve coordination.

Q Let's talk about international coordination on aviation issues. Aviation is increasingly becoming a global business. What role do you see the FAA taking on as far as setting safety standards internationally is concerned?

A The FAA has always placed great importance on its international relationships and on enhancing safety standards internationally. We promote best practices that will enhance safety across borders, and we work closely with long-standing and emerging international partners to further safety.

To promote international standards, we agreed at the 37th International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly in 2010 to share safety data with ICAO and the European Union. This will proactively help us determine where there are potential risks. We also now have a safety agreement with the EU, which helps to streamline safety oversight between two major aviation systems.

The FAA also takes a leading role at ICAO in promoting new safety standards that we feel are important to the global aviation system, and we provide technical assistance and training to other countries on effective oversight. Also, under the FAA's International Aviation Safety Assessment Program (IASA), a country's aviation authority must meet international safety standards before its airlines can fly to the United States. This helps raise the bar on safety throughout the world.

We are also very encouraged by the regional aviation safety groups that ICAO sponsors. The U.S. plays an active role in these groups to mitigate top safety risks. The groups in Latin America and Asia are especially proactive,

which is encouraging given the growth in air traffic in these regions.

Q After many years of discussing and planning, we are beginning to execute NextGen as demonstrated by decisions on ADS-B and increased development and implementation of RNAV. Now that we have some movement, do you see NextGen implementation escalating? What are the next steps?

A NextGen is a continuous rollout of new capabilities that maximize the benefits of the latest technology, including the precision of satellite navigation.

Our Metroplex initiative includes rolling out RNAV STARS at a number of airports across the country. These optimized profile descents allow aircraft to glide down with engines almost idle all the way from cruising altitude to final approach. These procedures are like sliding down a banister compared to walking down stairs, and they save millions of gallons of fuel a year nationwide.

We're also working on improving the spacing requirements for departures and landings, to get more out of our airspace in congested areas. We call this Equivalent Lateral Spacing Operations, or ELSO. Around Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, which is the world's busiest airport, we're using ELSO to get more done using a smaller amount of airspace by improving the efficiency of our operations.

We've also been using new departure routes in Atlanta for the past year that are made possible by the precision of satellite navigation. Hartsfield-Jackson can clear an additional 10 airplanes per hour thanks to these improvements to the "on ramps" to our highways in the sky. This reduces the amount of time pilots wait to take off. In fact, we estimate that performance-based navigation saved customers 700,000 minutes—which equates to 1.3 years—of waiting in line to take off in Atlanta last year.

It's better for the environment, too. All those jets spend less time on the ground idling their engines. So we're burning less fuel and decreasing pollution.

And let me also give you the update on DataComm. DataComm is essential to our being able to realize the full benefits of NextGen, including increased efficiency and safety, the ability to make complicated reroutes in mid-flight, and the reduction in waiting time to take off, among other things.

The big picture is that we are moving forward with DataComm in towers at 41 major airports starting in 2016. A few years later, we plan to start the rollout at enroute centers that



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cover the entire country.

And I can tell you we've already made significant progress with this system.

Last May, the FAA formally decided to adopt this program and to make it part of the way we operate. Last September, we awarded a contract to integrate DataComm into the many parts and pieces of our airspace system. I'm talking about ground automation, telecommunications, security firewalls, air-ground network services, and aircraft avionics. It all has to be integrated to work together.

On January 17, the FAA and FedEx made history when a FedEx MD-11 received a departure clearance to fly from Memphis to Miami using written instructions from the air traffic controller rather than a clearance spoken over the radio.

At 3:09 p.m. that day, the FAA controller pressed "CLEARED AS FILED," letting the FedEx pilots know they were cleared. The pilots "WILCO'd" in writing, and thus we took a small but significant step to providing DataComm to our airspace system. Flight crews and controllers reported the system performed as expected. We'll expand these trials in coming months to include more FedEx flights.

We'll also expand the DataComm trials to Newark Liberty International Airport, working with United Airlines and others. Again, we'll test the departure clearances with a limited number of airplanes at first, then move on to passenger flights as the trial progresses over the coming year.

While we are working more immediately on departure clearances from the towers, we intend to use DataComm when controlling high-altitude traffic as well. We have a team of experts from different lines of business inside the FAA to ensure that DataComm moves forward in a way that's coordinated and expedited.

A year ago, aviation stakeholders gave us recommendations for how to move forward with DataComm, and we heard you. We're acting on it. The recommendations are not sitting on a shelf gathering dust. This team of experts from across the agency is analyzing those recommendations in an orderly manner.

Q Airlines have sometimes been reluctant to make significant capital investments in equipment related to NextGen because of uncertainties surrounding full implementation. What are your thoughts on programs to incentivize this equipment in the interest of long-term NextGen success?

A The overall goal of equipment incentives is to encourage deployment of aircraft capable of taking advantage of NextGen

sooner. We are evaluating both operational and financial incentives. We've come to understand that these incentives are interconnected, and we have made progress in both areas over the past year.

The FAA held a public meeting on operational incentives back in March 2012. We gathered industry feedback on a series of potential projects in which pilots of aircraft with NextGen equipment would receive an improved level of service or access compared with those of lesser-equipped aircraft.

Since that time we have begun implementation planning and execution studies for five projects.

We continue to take steps toward a possible loan guarantee program. However, consistent with the Federal Credit Reform Act, we would need language in an appropriations act before we could actually start issuing loan guarantees.

We also need to be convinced the program will help accelerate the number of NextGen-capable aircraft operating in the national airspace system.

During two well-attended public meetings in May and August 2012, we received some feedback on the characteristics of a useful loan guarantee program. People said it should be flexible, the application process should be streamlined, and risk should be shared.

A key takeaway for us is that financial incentives alone are likely insufficient to encourage equipage. There needs to be a tie to an improved level operational service as well.

In an effort to better understand the potential relationship between financial incentives and the improved level of operational services, we recently released two market surveys.

In the second survey, we asked respondents to identify the top three to five NextGen capabilities that are the most important to them among other questions. The FAA continues to discuss the program with aircraft operators and potential private partners assessing interest and feedback.

Q How can our industry ensure that we offset any labor shortage and continue to attract the best and brightest candidates to become pilots, controllers, engineers, and other specialists?

A I am committed to the safety of the traveling public by making sure our aviation workforce is the most qualified and best trained in the world. We need to attract the best and brightest to careers in aviation. The FAA has had discussions with the airlines, pilots, and other stakeholders to obtain data to determine long-term pilot staffing needs and solutions. 

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