

AOPA

Grassroots petition launched to kill user-fee threat

By Alyssa J. Miller



Thanks to AOPA member Kevin Mossey of Marion, Iowa, pilots can now send a direct message to the White House: No user fees.

Mossey, a systems engineer and private pilot, created a ["take aviation user fees off the table" petition](#) on Sept. 23 through the White House website, ["We the People."](#)

"I wanted to do something," Mossey said, adding that he also might send a handwritten letter to the White House. "My thought was more that the White House and members of Congress hear a lot from lobbyists. ... "It's all coming from the same source over and over." He wanted the Obama administration to know that it's not just the industry that opposes user fees. So do pilots.

Mossey said he hopes this petition sends the message to senior White House officials that, "We don't want this. This isn't a good idea. We don't mind contributing our fair share, but this isn't the way to do it."

"Pilots have seen what happens when a government institutes user fees. Safety is compromised, costs go up, and our entire national transportation system suffers. No one wants to see that happen," said AOPA President Craig Fuller, who learned of the petition Sept. 25. "AOPA members are standing up for what they believe in, and we are standing with them."

The White House offers an online petition system that "provides a new way to petition the Obama Administration to take action on a range of important issues facing our country," the website states.

Mossey launched the petition just days after the Obama administration released the president's plan to reduce the deficit and grow the economy. The plan included a [proposed \\$100 fee](#) for users of air traffic services.

According to [draft wording of the user-fee plan](#), the Obama administration "proposes to establish a new mandatory surcharge for air traffic services. This proposal would create a \$100 per flight fee, payable to the FAA, by aviation operators who fly in controlled airspace. Military aircraft, public aircraft, recreational piston aircraft, air ambulances, aircraft operating outside of controlled airspace, and Canada-to-Canada flights would be exempted. The revenues generated by the surcharge would be deposited into the Airport and Airway Trust Fund. This fee would generate an estimated \$11 billion over 10 years. Assuming the enactment of the fee, total charges collected from aviation users would finance roughly three fourths of airport investments and air traffic control system costs."

In the petition, Mossey said, "The aviation community understands the need to raise revenue at a time when we all need to sacrifice, however, this should be done by increasing tax rates on aviation fuel, rather than on a per-flight basis. By using an existing system of revenue generation, the administration can put more of the revenue collected towards the operation of the air traffic control system, thus improving safety for the system overall.

"Furthermore, a tax on fuel more accurately reflects the actual ATC services used over a fixed flat fee, as a flight from NYC to LA will require more controller time than a flight from NYC to Boston."

Mossey said he wanted to express more points in his petition, but the White House limits the number of characters to 800. Safety is an area that could be compromised, he said, if a user fee is imposed.

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"On Sunday I went to the airport, I got in a Skyhawk, and did eight takeoffs and landings" for some crosswind practice, he said. "If that cost me an extra \$100 I might not." Mossey is a member of a flying club based at The Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids. The airport lies within Class C airspace to the surface, requiring contact with air traffic control.

AOPA has long advocated that general aviation "pay at the pump" through aviation fuel taxes and not through a user-fee system.

"If a petition gets enough support, White House staff will review it, ensure it's sent to the appropriate policy experts, and issue an official response," the official White House website states. The threshold currently stands at a petition receiving 5,000 signatures within 30 days. Those who wish to sign the petition must first sign up for a free account, which can be done from [the petition page](#).

"Make your opinion count. [Sign on to the petition](#) started by your fellow AOPA member," Fuller urged members in his blog. "It may take 5,000 people to get noticed—but what will happen if 500,000 pilots sign on? Let's find out!"

Mossey also encouraged pilots to not only sign the petition but to send a letter "snail mail" to the White House.



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