



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 23, 2013

Flight Delays Increasing as FAA Announces Sequester Furloughs

Last Sunday the Federal Aviation Administration [announced](#) that it was being forced to furlough its air traffic controllers because of cuts to its budget forced by the “sequestration” that began last month. An FAA statement said that travelers could expect to see “a wide range of delays ... [due to] staffing challenges.... The FAA is working with the airlines ... to try to minimize delays for passengers.”



Delays at major airports of up to 90 minutes were being reported late Sunday night and were spreading into Monday in New York, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Los Angeles. At New York’s John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia Airports, delays ranged from 37 to 74 minutes for inbound and outbound passengers, while delays at the Los Angeles International Airport were as much as three hours.

Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) called the FAA furloughs a “dangerous stunt that could jeopardize the safety and security of air travelers” that could have been avoided had the FAA even attempted to do so. Instead, according to Coburn, the FAA “has made zero effort” to avoid the furloughs and the delaying of passengers.

FAA Administrator Michael Hurta said that furloughs were necessary to offset the \$637 million in cuts demanded by the sequester out of its \$16 billion budget — that his people “could find no other way” but to furlough all 47,000 of the agency’s employees including its 15,000 air traffic controllers. Because of the furlough — initially requiring each employee to take off one day every two weeks — planes will have to take off and land less frequently, resulting in the anticipated delays.

Editors at *Investors Business Daily* (IBD) saw this phony furlough coming back in February, calling it “misleading.” IBD noted that back in 2000 the FAA handled 23 percent more air traffic with fewer controllers than it employs currently: “Either air traffic controllers have gotten far less efficient over the past 13 years, or the FAA could get by with about 3,400 fewer of them without affecting the quality of air travel one bit.”

For proof IBD noted that the private company that now runs Canada’s air traffic control, [Nav Canada](#), operates with one-quarter fewer employees than did the government when it controlled air traffic — before it privatized that responsibility back in 1996 — while air traffic has increased by half.

This is part of the plan, according to Shikha Dalmia, [writing for Reason.com](#). In early March President Obama flew around the country outlining all the terrible things that would happen once the sequester starting cutting essential government services:

There will be no first responders to help disaster-struck communities recover; prosecutors will be unable to put away criminals; schools will have to lay off teachers; parents will lose child care; and kids won’t get vaccinations.

Critics have pointed out that this is farcical on its face. The \$44 billion in sequester cuts for the balance



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of the fiscal year represents what the government borrows *every two weeks*. In a budget approaching \$4 trillion, \$44 billion is one percent, which some would call a “rounding error.”

What some have noted that is even more deceitful is that the president has on his desk [a report from the Government Accounting Office](#) (GAO) containing 17 areas of government “overlap” and 14 areas of potential savings, totaling more than \$95 billion, twice what is needed to make up for the sequester cuts he’s complaining about and *150 times* the shortfall being “suffered” by the FAA and as a result being inflicted on air travelers. Said the GAO, “We suggest 81 actions that the executive branch or Congress could take to reduce or eliminate fragmentation, overlap, or duplication.”

And that’s just in this year’s report. In 2011 and 2012, the GAO pointed out another \$200 billion in savings. [Said Senator Coburn](#):

While millions of Americans have been doing more with less, the federal government continues to do less with more.

The \$95 billion in overlap identified in this report, combined with the \$200 billion in overlap identified in GAO’s previous two reports, could easily cover the costs of sequestration.

Yet, instead of preventing furloughs, reopening air traffic control towers and restoring public access to White House, Congress and the administration continue to defend billions of dollars in duplicative programs that are little more than monuments to the good intentions of career politicians in Washington.

This year’s report from the GAO includes:

679 renewable energy initiatives at 23 federal agencies,

76 programs to prevent or treat drug abuse ... across 15 agencies,

Three federal offices ... involved in overseeing catfish inspections, and

159 contracting organizations in 10 different Defense Department components ... to provide foreign language support.

Even the \$637 million in cuts that is forcing the FAA to delay air travelers is fraudulent, [according to Logan Albright](#), writing for *FreedomWorks*:

The FAA only requested a budget of \$15.172 billion for fiscal year 2013. After the \$600 million dollar “reduction,” the amount they actually received was \$15.999 billion....

If we examine the budget for the FAA in fiscal year 2008, we can see that they only received \$14.077 billion in that year, which adjusted for inflation comes out to \$15.056 billion in today’s dollars. That’s almost a billion dollars less than the FAA received this year, and yet the amount of air travel in 2008 was significantly heavier than it is today....

So the bottom line is that we are looking at an agency being given a billion dollars more to manage nearly 6,000 fewer flights a year, and yet we are expected to believe that longer lines and more delays are unavoidable.

The Obama administration has no interest whatever in cutting government spending. Its focus is on expanding government and denigrating or ignoring any attempts to cut it. That’s why the GAO reports have been all but ignored by the president. That’s why the sequester cuts must be seen as “drastic” and “draconian” and the blame for the pain must be pinned onto anyone supporting them. The FAA is one of



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the most visible of the government agencies which can apply the pain where it does the most good: onto air travelers dependent upon regular schedules who can ill afford disruptions and delays. It has little to do with real economic austerity and everything to do with politics.

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