



THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

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Oh, the ‘Demons’ of Washington

Usually, I tend to stay away from political issues, but the reality is, the politicians aren’t staying out of our business. As Rambo said, “They drew first blood, not me.”

As many of you know, leading politicians have been making demons out of anyone who uses the tools we provide: business and general aviation aircraft. But we know better; we provide valuable business tools many companies simply could not operate without.

Recently, I attended the Women in Aviation conference in Atlanta, and Craig Fuller, the new president of AOPA, gave a few remarks. During his remarks, he reminded us that we cannot just sit back and watch the activity without getting involved. Therefore, I decided to focus this month’s column on the effective and arguably required use of a fleet of business aircraft.

There is a company based in Washington, D.C., that operated a fleet of 1,238 aircraft in 2008. Yes, 1,238 aircraft — which does not include aircraft operated by the Department of Defense. Yes, I am talking about the United States government.

I am not at all challenging the government’s use of aircraft; I fully and completely support its decision to use aircraft, like industry does, to better conduct the business of government. So, let’s not demonize industry for making the same decision and using the

same tools as government.

The National Business Aviation Association states, “While companies that rely on business aviation represent many different professions and locations, they all have one thing in common: the need for fast, flexible, safe, secure and cost-effective access to destinations across the country and around the world.”

This is interesting because the U.S. State Department, in defending the secretary of state’s use of an assigned Boeing 757, makes the following statements:

“Time is valuable when you are the secretary of state. The secretary’s airplane functions as a mobile office. Members of the press travel on the secretary’s plane and, at times, foreign dignitaries travel on the secretary’s plane also. The secretary’s plane is a reconfigured U.S. Air Force Boeing 757 that is outfitted with a cabin for the secretary, seats for the staff, and security and a communications section for continuous information anywhere in the world.”

Let’s see:

- “Time is valuable.”
- “The airplane functions as a mobile office.”
- “The airplane carries foreign dignitaries (customers).”
- “The airplane is outfitted with a cabin for the secretary (executive), seats for additional staff, security and a communications section for continuous information anywhere in the world.”

This all pretty much sounds like the same reasons we use business aircraft, doesn’t it?

In fiscal year 2008, the total aircraft (not including the Department of Defense) costs were more than \$941 million — which is nearly 1 billion taxpayer dollars for the government to operate (and lease) its business aircraft. The acquisition cost of the federal aircraft fleet is nearly \$4 billion. The market value of the federal aircraft fleet was nearly \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2008.

When looking at how the government uses its aircraft, 76 percent of the aircraft are used for law enforcement, firefighting and special-mission needs. The government also operates 30 aircraft configured for passenger and cargo transport.

These 1,238 aircraft do not include aircraft used by the government’s CEO, President Obama; its COO, Vice President Biden; or the various congressional executives as they perform U.S. business around the world. For this service, the White House and Congress rely on the U.S. Air Force — primarily the USAF 89th Airlift Wing, based at Andrews Air Force Base in the Washington, D.C., suburbs.

With an Air Expeditionary Force, the combat-ready force of more than 1,000 personnel, the 89th Airlift Wing provides global special air mission airlift, logistics, aerial port and communications for the president, vice president, combat com-

manders, senior leaders and the global mobility system as tasked by the White House chief of staff of the Air Force and Air Mobility Command.

In support of its governmental support operations, the 89th Airlift Wing operates VC-25A "Air Force One" (Boeing 747); C-20B (Gulfstream III); C-32A (Boeing 757); C-37A (Gulfstream V); and C-40B (Boeing 737). In addition, various foreign commands, headquarters commands and National Guard commands operate C-21s (Lear 35s).

The military variant of the Gulfstream IV is designated C-20F, G, H or J, depending on the military service.

The U. S. Navy and Marine Corps operate C-20G aircraft. The U.S. Air Force operates the C-20H, which is a G IV-SP model for its command/executive transport role. The U.S. Army operates the C-20J, which is a G IV-SP model for its command/executive transport role.

In addition to the 21 passenger aircraft operated by the 12 executive agencies reporting under the Federal Aviation Interactive Reporting System, the Department of Defense operates another 100 or so business aircraft, such as Lear 35s, Gulfstream G-IIIs, G-IVs, G-Vs, Boeing 737s, 747s and 757s.

The federal guidelines for aircraft use are clearly defined in Title 41 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 102, "Federal Management Regulation," Subchapter B, "Personal Property," Part 102-33, "Management of Government Aircraft." The policy states, "Required use means use of an aircraft for the travel of an executive where the use of the aircraft is required because of bona fide communications or security needs or exceptional scheduling requirements."

In the guidance, agencies shall operate government aircraft only for official purposes. Official purposes include the operation of government aircraft for mission requirements and other official travel.

Generally, these are persons employed by the White House and executive agencies, including independent agencies, at

a rate of pay equal to or greater than the minimum rate of basic pay for the senior executive service. Exempted from this definition are active duty military officers.

This company (the federal government) has clear guidance on the personal use of its corporate fleet. Should the need arise, the company requires employees to reimburse the company for any personal use. Its policy states, "For a wholly personal trip, the full coach fare for the trip" shall be paid.

This reads like good company policy shared by most, if not all, public businesses operating business aircraft.

I found it disingenuous when Congress, the White House and various political pundits pontificated about these demons wasting American tax dollars on these "business boondoggles," while at the same time, the federal government operates a fleet of business aircraft larger than any public enterprise.

Why haven't you heard of this fleet before? Perhaps because the mainstream

media rides along for free — that's right, the mainstream media gets to travel with political leaders at the taxpayers' expense.

Business aircraft are vital tools for efficient business, whether the business is oil exploration, manufacturing, property management, investment management or running the military, executive governmental functions or fact-finding missions for Congress.

The bottom line is, the only demons here are those standing in glass houses and throwing stones.

For more information, read the U.S. Government Services Administration Federal Aircraft Report, Fiscal Year 2008, and visit these websites: www.state.gov/secretary/trvl; www.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?fsID=87; and www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a126. □

If you have comments or questions about this article, send e-mails to avionicsnews@aea.net.

Federal Operational Aircraft Fleet Inventory in 2008	
Department of Commerce	13
Department of Energy	22
Department of Homeland Security	264
Department of Justice	213
Department of State	274
Department of Transportation	49
Department of Interior	93
NASA	85
National Science Foundation	6
Non-FAIRS Reporting Agency	1
Tennessee Valley Authority	7
Department of Agriculture	211
Total:	1,238