

Personal Advocacy Starts with You

by Max Trescott

Advocacy is taking action to influence the outcome of an issue. If you're passionate about general aviation, and want to preserve it for future generations, you need to be actively involved. Don't worry if you don't feel you have the time or a particular talent, as there are lots of ways to be involved.

Two of the biggest issues facing General Aviation are user fees being proposed in the Senate and the decline in the pilot population. User fees in other countries have effectively strangled general aviation, increasing the costs and decreasing the pilot population. To have a strong voice in the legislative process to prevent user fees and other future threats to general aviation, we need lots of pilots. However, since 1980, the number of pilots has shrunk from 800,000 to fewer than 600,000 today.

Here are ways that you can become a strong advocate in both of these areas.

User Fees

- 1) Monitor the status of pending legislation through the [AOPA](#) and [EAA](#) websites.
- 2) When critical votes are pending, contact your legislators. A simple fax, letter or phone call will do.
- 3) Consider become an advocate for protecting your own local airport. See if [AOPA's Airport Support Network](#) needs a volunteer to monitor activity at your airport. Then keep your ear to the ground by attending local airport management and pilot groups so that you can get an early warning of any impending threats.
- 4) Respond to pending rulemakings at the FAA. For example, if you have any feelings for how the new ADS-B system might affect you positively or negative, send you suggestions to the FAA before the comment period ends on March 3, 2008. Or, [send your comments to me](#) and I'll incorporate them into my response.

Growing the Pilot Population

- 1) Find at least two acquaintances that have some interest in aviation and can afford flight training. Offer to take them on a local flight and to mentor them through the process of selecting a flight instructor and training materials.
- 2) Sign up online to become a mentor on through [AOPA's Project Pilot](#). The website will help match you with a student pilot in your area who's seeking the help of an experienced pilot like you.
- 3) Become a member of the EAA and help teenagers experience their first flight by giving them airplane rides through the Young Eagles program.
- 4) Become a flight instructor yourself. First, you'll enjoy the challenge of completing the CFI rating. Later, you'll share in the satisfaction of helping someone else achieve their dreams of flight. There's a shortage of CFI's due to the increase in hiring by regional airlines, so there's never been a better time to become a flight instructor.

There are really just two steps to become an advocate, and you've already done the first, which is to think about how you might become involved. The second step is easy—just do it!