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Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman (front row, second from right) declares May 2012 General Aviation Appreciation Month. Alliance Press Secretary Devin Osting, Nebraska Department of Aeronautics Director Ronnie Mitchell, Nebraska Aviation Council President Sandi Decker, and Nebraska Aviation Trades Association President Brian Wilcox, among others, were present for the signing of the proclamation.

Alliance for Aviation Across America Standing Together to Protect General Aviation

By Selena Shilad

The last several years have brought many diverse challenges for the general aviation community. In addition to the economic downturn, businesses and groups that use general aviation have faced increased scrutiny as a result of ongoing misconceptions and a lack of awareness about the immense value of general aviation. Local airports have faced funding challenges, and the threat of user fees remains on the horizon.

Because of ongoing perception issues and the economic downturn, many businesses have felt pressure to curtail flying or divest their aircraft. Other challenges, such as the Budget Control Act's sequestration mandate, scheduled to take effect on January 2, 2013, threaten funding for our air transportation system as a whole. (See "Peering Over the Edge," p. 10,

for more on the possible effects of sequestration.)

The good news is that the general aviation community has an incredibly powerful story to tell — and through the industry advocacy group Alliance of Aviation Across America, we are finding ways to tell that story. Across our nation, for literally thousands of communities, helicopters and general aviation aircraft help to transport patients to safety and life-saving medical care in emergency situations; support fire fighting, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations; transport blood, platelets, and organs to patients in need; and help with disaster relief operations. General aviation provides businesses with the advantage of being able to visit multiple locations in a single day, travel to far-off markets, and carry

tools and demonstration equipment that could not be transported easily otherwise.

Groups like the Airborne Law Enforcement Association, an Alliance member, educate and train law enforcement officials across the country on how to maximize the functionality and safety of aircraft — especially helicopters — in law enforcement applications. Through this training and proper use of aircraft, law enforcement officials are able to locate missing people and suspects more quickly, as well as minimize potential danger to officers on the ground by providing information about their surroundings.

Another Alliance member, Columbia Helicopters, owns and operates heavy-lift helicopters that

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aid logging projects, facilitate stream restoration projects to protect the environment, and help to fight wildfires. These helicopters also move oil wells in the jungles of Peru and Papua New Guinea and provide military logistical support in Afghanistan.

In addition to the specific missions that general aviation aircraft accomplish every day, these aircraft and airports are a significant economic driver, accounting for \$150 billion in economic activity and 1.2 million American jobs. The general aviation manufacturing industry is one of the only segments of the American manufacturing sector that contributes positively to the U.S. balance of trade. In addition, many in the general public are not aware that 85 percent of the businesses that own and operate a general aviation aircraft are actually small- to mid-sized businesses and thus a critical driver for the health of our economy.

The good news is that we at the Alliance believe that these tides are finally turning. Thanks to the collective

efforts of many within and outside of the general aviation community, there is a greater awareness than ever among our elected state and local leaders about the value of general aviation and airports for our local communities. In fact, 40 U.S. governors around the country have now recognized the value of aviation for our national and local economies; 37 of those governors specifically recognized the value of general aviation. In addition, Governors Mary Fallin of Oklahoma, John Lynch of New Hampshire, C.L. "Butch" Otter of Idaho, Dennis Daugaard of South Dakota, and Pat Quinn of Illinois have written letters to President Obama outlining the critical importance of general aviation.

Local lawmakers have also been active in support of general aviation. More than 100 U.S. mayors last year sent a letter to President Obama outlining the importance of general aviation and local airports for communities around the country. The General Aviation Caucus has grown to 188 representatives and 39 senators who are committed to protecting

general aviation, making it one of the largest caucuses in Washington, DC. (Learn more about the GA Caucus in "General Aviation's Voice on Capitol Hill," p. 18.) In summary, our coalition of allies supporting general aviation is larger and more diverse than ever.

These are all positive developments, but with new challenges constantly on the horizon, it is essential that we work together to raise awareness about the value of general aviation. To that end, the Alliance and its staff are thrilled to be working in a closer capacity with the helicopter community: we are extremely pleased that HAI President Matt Zuccaro has recently joined our Alliance board of directors. With our newly relaunched website and these closer partnerships, we hope that working with the Alliance is easier than ever for our partners in vertical aviation.

Please take a minute to sign up as a member of the Alliance at www.AviationAcrossAmerica.org. At our website, you can learn more about Alliance goals, share your story about how your helicopter supports your business or organization, and reach out to work with us on raising awareness about the value of these aircraft in your local community.

Our collective efforts make a huge difference in educating community leaders, lawmakers, and others about the contributions of this crucial form of transportation. Together, we are better prepared to fight ongoing challenges, both large and small. **R**

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is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of more than 5,900 individuals representing businesses, agricultural groups, fixed-based operators, airports, elected officials, charitable organizations, and leading business and aviation groups that support the interest of the general aviation community across various public policy issues. The Alliance website is www.AviationAcrossAmerica.org.