

FAA to make matching grants to local communities for airport construction and improvement. For many years the Congress appropriated \$75 million annually, as this was roughly equivalent to Grant in Aid requests which were received. But as the airport crisis has increased, the volume of requests for aid has increased and has backlogged. For F.Y. 1968 FAA received 778 requests, totaling \$339 million. The answer of the House Appropriations Committee to this emergency was to reduce the agency's \$75 million request for fiscal 1969 to \$65 million.

We pointed out in our editorial in the Journal of Air Traffic Control in January of this year the need for immediate action to acquire additional personnel to meet the rising tide of air traffic within the next 10 years. The editorial is entitled, "The Folly of Fiscal Brinkmanship," and we should like it quoted in full for the record.

Anyone with more than 10 years in aviation remembers from first hand experience the rag-tag condition of the nation's air traffic control system in the middle fifties. Despite an explosive increase in the number of flights using the system, the Civil Aeronautics Administration lagged a decade behind. With each passing year, aviation's thundering progress further magnified the system's stagnation.

It took the Curtis Committee, RTCA, the Airways Modernization Board, sundry other committees of "experts" and—most of all—several bone-chilling air tragedies to finally convince the lawmakers and the fiscal planners of what every air traffic controller and pilot had known for years—that the system was woefully short of both trained people and modern equipment.

When the dozing Department of Commerce finally woke up to the fact that air traffic demands could not possibly be met with people already on the payroll, they were already five years late! The ranks of experienced air traffic controllers were decimated by the sudden addition of new facilities and services. And, alas, there was no one to fill the gaps because there never had been an intelligent and foresighted plan for recruiting and training replacements.

Well, everyone knew that the government had been caught with its collective pants down. But there was no time for fault finding. While the sharp-pencilled fiscal planners fidgeted with their ledgers and scratched their heads in dismay, CAA mounted a frantic recruiting and training program. To say that recruiters occasionally took some liberties with the entrance standards would be a gross understatement. For the prospective controller, a warm body that could see lightning and hear thunder was almost as good as holding three-of-a-kind in stud poker!

It took a lot of time, money and sweat—and not a little luck—to bring the new recruits up to speed while also running the system safely. The controller workforce, growing from 4,111 in 1955 to 12,333 in 1960, was more than tripled in size in five short years. Somehow the system survived and things gradually began to pick up. But, in the meantime, the industry and the traveling public suffered mightily. How much, no one will ever know because fiscal planners never keep those figures.

An ominous note was struck at the recent ATCA National Conventional in Miami where the current phenomenal growth in aviation proved to be the number one topic of discussion. This onrushing tide of aviation activity is, even now, placing tremendous demands on the air traffic control system. Over the next five years, it will make the growth wave which nearly swamped the system in the middle fifties look like a mere ripple.

Since 1960, there have been less than 700 new air traffic control positions added to the system. Yet, in the same period, no less than 94 new ATC facilities have been commissioned. Viewed against the skyrocketing activity in aviation, these figures become almost incredible.

Nevertheless, we find that the government's fiscal planners have again pruned away the possibility of anything but negligible hiring in the coming year. Undoubtedly, they are banking on automation to bail them out of this predicament. If that's the case, they are either ill-informed or someone has led them down the garden path!

It's hard to imagine that those who are knowledgeable in the business of air traffic control would advise the fiscal planners that automation, particularly at the outset, will suddenly enable the current corps of controllers to cope with vast increases in air traffic. Insofar as sheer numbers of flights are concerned, there is scant evidence that automation of ground facilities alone will increase the overall capacity of our air transportation system. Certainly not when the automation of ATC facilities is being accomplished piecemeal, and at a snail's pace. And certainly not so long as our airports continue to be such big bottlenecks.