The March 2020 Flight Report
by HAI President and CEO James Viola

Welcome to the first edition of VFR, or Viola’s Flight Report. I'm Jim and I plan to use this newsletter to share what Helicopter Association International is doing to support our members. If you have questions, suggestions, or want to reply about a topic, drop me a line at president@rotor.org.

COVID-19: How Our Industry Can Help

Let’s face it, the COVID-19 virus is creating havoc around the world unlike anything we’ve experienced in more than 100 years. But today, we have the advantage of resources that weren’t around during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic: helicopters and remotely piloted vehicles.

Unlike in many disasters, our highways and infrastructure are intact. Large shipments of needed supplies can reach staging areas and distribution centers. But getting those supplies to the people who need them presents challenges during this time of social distancing and panic-driven hoarding.

How can vital supplies like food and medicines reach those in need? It’s simple: VTOL aircraft can help.

Helicopters around the world continue to support both airborne law enforcement and air ambulance services. These missions are more essential than ever and show no sign of slowing. In fact, taking advantage of air ambulance service may reduce patients’ contact with other people. To those law enforcement and medical personnel who continue to fly, we applaud your commitment to your community.

While remotely piloted vehicles don’t yet make a significant number of flights, situations like this are prime opportunities for this industry segment to demonstrate its ability to deliver a variety of supplies to people, with nearly no personal contact. If your
company is participating in any form of remotely piloted air-delivery missions, let us know! In fact, tell everyone! If you’d like assistance in preparing a press release, contact Dan Sweet in our Public Relations and Communications office.

As part of HAI’s effort to alert government officials of our availability to assist in this time of crisis, I signed a joint letter to US Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, alerting her to our capabilities and availability.

COVID-19: Regulatory Delays

HAI is aware that many of our operator members are experiencing delays with regulatory agencies around the world, such as being unable to receive checkrides for pilots. This is likely due to the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We’ve been in touch with the FAA in the United States to address these delays, and we’ll reach out to other governments as requested. Please let us know if you need our assistance.

COVID-19: Requests for Economic Assistance

HAI also understands the economic impact the pandemic is having on our industry. Between the extreme volatility of the financial markets and social distancing’s upending of the norms of daily life, it seems there’s no safe corner—particularly if you’re a business owner with others looking to you to keep the lights on.

Many governments are preparing economic assistance packages or have already done so. To ensure that the rotorcraft industry isn’t overlooked, we’re reaching out to governments and affiliate associations around the world to voice our concerns and promote our ability to provide essential services. I understand the New Zealand government has included helicopter operations in its assistance package.

As of this writing, the US Congress is in the home stretch of sending a $2 trillion coronavirus relief package to the president to be signed into law. This will be the third relief package to be enacted since the spread of the virus reached the US. I am pleased to share with you that several of HAI’s priorities were included. Over $30 billion in grants will be allocated to companies in the aviation sector, with general aviation qualifying for a significant portion.

Further assistance to the vertical lift industry will be provided by the $100 million in grant funding dedicated to general aviation airports, which was included in the latest bill. Tax relief, access to low-interest federal loans, and an easing of certain regulatory requirements affecting our industry are among some of the other tools provided in the relief packages.

In advance of this bill, HAI joined other aviation associations in preparing a statement outlining the economic impact facing our industry. We and five other general aviation associations sent a letter to the leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives, asking that our industry be included in future aid packages. We also worked with 29
civil aviation associations to produce a similar letter, bringing additional voices to support our position. Most recently, we joined with six other associations to send a letter supporting assistance to general aviation airports.

Additionally, I have the HAI staff working on several other methods of making elected US officials aware of the challenges our industry faces.

International Opportunities

From the moment I was hired to lead HAI, I’ve been clear that two of our goals are to increase HAI’s support for our international members and to increase membership in this area as well. Meeting these two objectives is required if we are to live up to our mission of leading an industry that lives, works, and does business all around the world.

I also stated a goal of making international visits a priority. While COVID-19 has slowed progress on that effort somewhat, we did just complete a successful meeting of the HAI Board of Directors in Australia. The spring board meeting is traditionally held wherever the current board chair lives and works. Jan Becker and her husband, Mike, operate Becker Helicopters in Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, so I and other board members traveled to that location.

One event that proved very valuable to me was an evening reception we held for local members and industry representatives. I met there with representatives from the Australian Helicopter Industry Association (AHIA) to discuss how our two organizations could join forces for mutual support and benefit. We discussed how a partnership or chapter system might work. There are still many issues to work out, and the situation in every country will be different. Still, HAI has affiliate organizations around the world, and we would become a better, stronger association through these mutually beneficial collaborations.

Following these meetings in Australia, I had planned to visit representatives from the New Zealand Helicopter Association (NZHA) and the helicopter industry there. Regrettfully, I postponed this visit due to international health concerns. Rest assured, I will make this trip at the next opportunity.

HAI Membership

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that the renewal period for HAI membership will open May 1. Please look for your renewal soon. I know that these are challenging times, but without your support, we’d have to limit the work we’re doing on your behalf around the world.

Your membership also provides you with members-only pricing on HAI networking and education programs, as well as discounts on aviation products and services. We’re close to adopting new programs that will make your HAI membership even more valuable. In the meantime, you can visit our membership portal to renew, or to
update your information. If you have any questions about your membership, or to pay by phone, please contact the HAI membership department at member@rotor.org or 703-683-4646.

Stay safe and fly safe!

James Viola
President and CEO