

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE
APPROPRIATIONS
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SMALL BUSINESS

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller,

I understand the considerable difficulty you face in negotiating a long-term Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization with the House of Representatives. As your diligent efforts continue, it is my hope that you will consider the urgency of a timely agreement for many small and rural communities, particularly those served by Delta Airlines.

As you know, Delta is in the process of eliminating turboprop aircraft from its fleet. This will considerably increase the size of their smallest aircraft, making it difficult for them to serve a number of small cities that are in the Essential Air Service Program. That may result in air service disruptions in a number of states across the country, including Iowa. Delta has been working so service can be smoothly transferred to alternative carriers. This would include agreements related to ticketing, baggage, and other areas. However, because of some uncertainty about the EAS program, new carriers will likely encounter considerable difficulty acquiring or leasing new aircraft to replace Delta's larger turboprops, possibly diminishing air service in some locales. Moreover, complying with FAA requirements for the new aircraft, such as pilot training, will involve additional delay in the new aircraft being placed into service.

We risk encountering a situation in which those cities currently served by turboprop aircraft will have difficulty acquiring appropriate replacement planes or will end up with planes that do not meet their needs. As a result, the quality and capacity of service will decline, reducing use and increasing the cost of the subsidies. Legislatively, the best solution is to complete a FAA reauthorization that preserves EAS support for the cities involved. The more quickly this can be accomplished, the less disruption the impacted cities and passengers will face. In addition, I would like to stress the need to preserve the ability and rights of cities not currently receiving EAS subsidies to actively participate in the program. Without such efforts, some situations may result that would be extremely inequitable.

I am very appreciative of your efforts to maintain a strong, broad EAS program that continues to serve small town America. Thank you for considering my concern in your work to complete negotiations as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



Tom Harkin
United States Senator