

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 22, 2011

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United State Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison:

We are writing to urge you to preserve the Essential Air Service (EAS) program during conference negotiations on the FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act.

The EAS program plays a critical role in the economic development efforts of rural America, particularly in terms of attracting and retaining businesses that depend on commercial air service. It also plays an important role in healthcare delivery by providing citizens with easier access to sophisticated healthcare that is often absent in rural communities.

While the Senate-passed version of the FAA legislation, S.223, does impose new restrictions on eligibility for the EAS program, the House-passed legislation, H.R.658, goes much further by including a sunset provision that would terminate the program on October 1, 2013, for all states except Alaska and Hawaii. The House provision, if adopted, would end commercial air service to more than 100 rural communities throughout the continental United States at a time when these communities are struggling with the effects of the longest and deepest economic recession since the Great Depression.

One such community is Rutland, Vermont. EAS subsidizes the only commercial air service at the Rutland Southern Vermont Regional Airport, which connects the Rutland region to the national air transportation system, sustains local jobs and spurs economic activity. As Rutland City Mayor Christopher Louras has explained to us, the likely impact on the regional economy of eliminating EAS funding cannot be understated, especially considering that the region already suffers from an inadequate transportation system.

We acknowledge the unprecedented economic situation facing the country and the difficult decisions before you. In that context, we strongly believe that the EAS program needs to be improved, rather than eliminated in a manner that threatens the economic prosperity of some of our most vulnerable rural communities. We encourage you to reject the House sunset provision, and instead, preserve a strong EAS program that serves the transportation needs of rural America.

We appreciate your consideration of this request, and we look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator