

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2011

Dear Colleague:

As members of the bipartisan Senate Essential Air Service (EAS) Caucus, we write to ask that you support rural communities and support S. 1387, a clean extension of the U.S. aviation program. The EAS Caucus opposes H.R. 2553, the bill proposed to be the twenty-first short-term extension of the aviation program. The House of Representatives has not yet named conferees for the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization conference, and July 22 is the expiration date for the latest extension of the aviation program. Unlike the previous twenty short-term extensions, H.R. 2553 is not a clean extension but will cut funding to a number of small communities that currently rely on the EAS program for safety and accessibility.

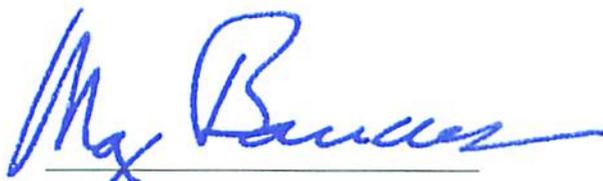
H.R. 2553 would limit EAS to locations that are 90 or more miles away from the nearest hub airport. Airports no longer receiving funding would be, according to the Department of Transportation: Lancaster, PA; Jackson, TN; Oil City, PA; Johnstown, PA; Jonesboro, AR; Hagerstown, MD; Bradford, PA; Morgantown, WV; Jamestown, NY; and Athens, GA. House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman John Mica released a press statement explaining that the proposed new cap on subsidies included in H.R. 2553 would also halt services to Ely, Nevada; Alamogordo/Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; and Glendive, Montana.

While deregulating the airline industry in 1978, Congress established the EAS program to ensure that rural areas would remain within the mainstream and maintain the safety and security that comes with access to air travel. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, approximately 1.1 million passengers were able to fly as a result of the program in 2009, the last year for which we have records. EAS makes rural areas more accessible. It encourages economic activity, spurs private sector job creation, and, crucially, helps small communities with limited abilities to respond to medical emergencies.

We ask that you oppose new restrictions on EAS funding. First, we oppose limiting EAS to locations that are 90 or more miles away from the nearest hub airport. Current rules already exclude communities located within 70 miles of a hub, and extending this distance will prevent deserving communities from important transportation options. Second, we oppose cutting EAS funding for airports that receive more than \$1000 in subsidy per passenger. According to the Congressional Research Service, communities are already excluded from EAS funding if the rate of subsidy per passenger is in excess of \$200, unless the community is more than 210 miles from *the nearest hub airport*. As mentioned above, EAS crucially helps small communities with limited abilities to respond to medical emergencies. These communities should not be limited in this way.

Thank you for considering these issues. They are important to our constituents. We ask that you support S. 1387 for rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Max Baucus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath it.

Max Baucus
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Murkowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath it.

Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator