

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

July 18, 2011

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

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science and Transportation
560 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Hutchison:

I am writing to urge you to protect the Essential Air Service (EAS) program in the FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act as you negotiate with the House of Representatives in the conference committee.

Minnesota currently has three airports that receive EAS subsidies for their flights: the Chisholm-Hibbing Municipal Airport, the Falls International Airport and the Thief River Falls Regional Airport. Unfortunately, last week Delta Air Lines announced the retirement of their fleet of Saab aircraft, many of which fly to EAS eligible airports. This announcement means that two additional Minnesotan airports will now rely on EAS to maintain commercial air service: the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport and the Bemidji Regional Airport.

Delta's announcement reinforces the case for protecting EAS. EAS was created to maintain air service to communities that otherwise may have been abandoned when the airlines were deregulated in 1978. Delta's announcement has made it clear that, without EAS, five airports in my state would no longer have commercial service. This would be devastating to the economy in these communities, which depends on commercial air service to be their connection to the interstate and global business communities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and for your leadership on reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration. Please remember communities like these when you decide the fate of the Essential Air Service program.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
United States Senator

Cc:
The Honorable Ray LaHood, Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation