

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2011

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

We write regarding the recent passage of the Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2011 (H.R. 2553).

As you know, the FAA Extension recently passed by Congress ensured that FAA employees could immediately return to work and provides modest reforms to the Essential Air Services (EAS) program. EAS was intended to be a temporary program to allow small, rural airports to transition to a market based environment, following airline deregulation. However, over 30 years later, taxpayers continue to subsidize flights that, in some cases, have reached a nearly \$4,000 per passenger subsidy and, in other cases, are provided to airports within short driving distances to other major commercial airports.

In an effort to safeguard taxpayers against the continuation of excess subsidies, Congress included a provision in H.R. 2553 that would eliminate EAS subsidies for those airports located less than 90-miles from a medium and large hub airport, and for those airports receiving an average subsidy of \$1,000 or more per passenger enplanement. This provision also gives you the discretion to waive the 90-mile requirement if you determine that the geographic characteristics of the location result in undue difficulty in accessing the nearest medium or large hub airport. Since this provision was approved by both chambers of Congress, we expect the Department of Transportation to implement the reforms and only grant a waiver to the 90-mile requirement when there is clear and substantial evidence of "geographic characteristics" resulting in "undue difficulty accessing" the nearest hub airport.

We also expect the Department of Transportation to provide complete transparency throughout this process and request a full, written justification for any waivers granted as a result of this legislation, so taxpayers are privy to the rationale of any exemptions. It is also important for us to understand the reasons the Department may grant waivers, so we can consider such justifications before providing similar authority in future legislation and other programs.

We look forward to your response. Thank you for your service to our country.

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
Senator



John Mica
Member of Congress



Rand Paul, M.D.
Senator



Mike Lee
Senator



Jim DeMint
Senator