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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2402

February 8, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

I write in strong opposition to any attempt to repeal the Essential Air Service (EAS) program in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization bill. Last week, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) filed an amendment to eliminate this program which currently improves air transportation service in nearly 150 communities across the United States. Based on my discussions with local officials, a repeal of the EAS program would deal a fatal blow to many small airports.

Created after airline deregulation in 1978, the EAS program was designed to be administered by the Department of Transportation. The program ensures that small, often rural, communities have access to our air transit system. Mississippi has three EAS facilities in Greenville—which I represent—Hattiesburg-Laurel, and Meridian.

A reduction or elimination of funding will have grave effects on the local airports and the communities they serve. In 2010, 7,100 commercial passengers flew from Mid-Delta Regional Airport. Without Mid-Delta Regional, these passengers would face an onerous three-hour drive to either Memphis, Tennessee or Jackson, Mississippi. EAS facilities also serve as major economic engines for their communities. Not only do these airports ensure access to other economic centers of the country, but they also employ dozens of workers. These are good-paying, quality jobs in communities that have faced tough times during this economic downturn.

While I certainly understand the need to reign in government spending, I must adamantly object to doing so at the expense of our country's rural communities. We should take a more comprehensive approach to dealing with the fiscal obligations associated with our nation's air transportation needs. I humbly ask that you do all that you can to defeat this amendment and

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protect rural America. I thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you during the 112th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a stylized "G".

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress