

Joint Leadership of the Kansas Legislature

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State of Kansas

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Mike James
National Editor
USA Today
7950 Jones Branch Drive
McLean, Va. 22107

Dear Mr. James

Over the past two weeks, USA Today has published a series of slanted, one-sided stories about general aviation airports, AIP funding and the Essential Air Service program. We are concerned that these stories not only contain several factual inaccuracies, they ignore the significant value of smaller airports to small towns and local economies throughout the US.

First, your article completely misrepresents the allocation process for Essential Air Service (EAS) and Airport Improvement Project (AIP) funds. While nearly 100 communities have lost commercial airline service in the last year, this funding makes it possible for residents to access many of the services available in large hub cities. EAS funds are given as a voluntary subsidy to *airline companies* serving non-hub communities.

On the other hand, Airport Improvement Project funding goes to *airports*. Your contention that smaller airports take money away from large airports is completely false. Larger airports benefit mainly from Passenger Facility Charges (PFC's) as well as the AIP program. Small airports, meanwhile, *only* receive AIP funding and have a much lower limit of AIP funds than larger airports. Moreover, AIP funds are awarded to those airports in greatest need of safety improvements.

In your latest article, you castigate the Essential Air Service (EAS) program as money thrown away on small towns with no need for commercial air service. You ignore the fact that the average population of EAS cities is over 80,000, and that the average distance from one of these cities to a commercial airport is over 200 miles. We refer you to the numerous local news stories which have appeared subsequent to your articles which correctly highlight the great economic and civic value of local airports and the EAS.

For those of us who live and work in America's heartland, these airports are literally a lifeline to access resources, business and medical care. The truth is the majority of the 5,000 communities that rely on general aviation do not have commercial service and are hours away from an airline hub. General aviation is the only way to provide these citizens with the goods and services necessary for their day-to-day lives. That is why the FAA has recognized the singular value to our national economy of a comprehensive nationwide air transportation system and has made maintaining these airports a national

priority. Not only are these public assets invaluable drivers of economic growth and vitality, they are also used by the National Guard, law enforcement, air ambulances, search-and-rescue operators, flight schools, small businesses, charitable organizations, farmers and ranchers, as well as for medical care and organ and blood transplant operations.

You have chosen to ignore the fact that general aviation provides over 1.2 million good paying jobs and generates over \$150 billion in economic impact for our country. The United States dominates the world in the production of general aviation aircraft, half of which are exported, contributing to our international trade balance.

As elected leaders of our State, we call on you to correct these inaccuracies and to publicly recognize the great value of our general aviation air system, and the EAS.

We look forward to your quick response and a public correction of the facts.

Sincerely,



Stephen R. Morris
Senate President



Michael O'Neal
Speaker of the House