

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE NICK J. RAHALL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
HEARINGS ON “FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION REAUTHORIZATION: THE FAA
ADMINISTRATOR”
AND
“FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION REAUTHORIZATION: STAKEHOLDERS”
FEBRUARY 8-9, 2011**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, Mr. Costello, for holding this hearing and for your commitment to the passage of a long-term bill to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In my view, we must enact a bill that not only will modernize our aging air traffic control system and airport infrastructure, but also will create and protect jobs. Last year’s bipartisan work to get a bill done shows that we all share the same goal: to keep modernization on time and on course, while creating and protecting jobs. Congress came very close to enacting a job-creating, bipartisan bill last year that would have met that goal, and I have every confidence that, working together, we will wind up this year with a bill that keeps our air transportation system and our economy moving forward.

I would to focus my remarks on ensuring that Congress keeps the promise it made to rural communities in 1978, when it deregulated the airline industry. In the *Airline Deregulation Act* we sent a message to people in those communities that the Nation’s aviation system was not just for part of America, but for all of America, and Congress committed to fund essential air service (EAS) to maintain those communities’ links to the larger aviation system.

My home state of West Virginia has four communities that are eligible for EAS this year. EAS links these communities to the global system of commerce. It carries their goods. It brings families together. And it creates and sustains local jobs. Rural communities have literally grown up around EAS, and Congress must ensure the program remains viable and successful.

I was disappointed to learn last week that Senator McCain apparently wants to go back on Congress’s promise to people in small communities and to repeal the EAS program. Repeal of the program would cut a lifeline that helps sustain more than 150 small communities. Senator McCain’s proposal would endanger local jobs and would harm the way of life in small towns that depend on the EAS program. When a government program works so well for so many people who depend on it – and delivers an excellent return on investment – we should work to preserve that program and to ensure its continued success.

To reap the job-sustaining benefits of EAS for rural America, we must maintain the program in a fiscally responsible manner. I look forward to working with you, Mr.

Chairman, to think creatively about improving the EAS program and providing robust EAS funding in this legislation. I look forward to continuing Congress' unwavering, bipartisan commitment to EAS.

Now, I do not invoke the names of Wilbur and Orville lightly, but I can't help but wonder what they would think of the flying experience today. I think Wilbur and Orville would be pleased with the progress we have made. But I think that they, as innovators and inventors, would challenge us to go further, to stay focused on how to modernize our system and keep it running on time and on course.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.