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– FIELD SENATE TESTIMONY –
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DUBUQUE REGIONAL AIRPORT

Good Morning –

I am pleased to be here representing the greater Dubuque community. I am Steven Accinelli a resident of the City of Dubuque currently serving as the Director of Aviation Programs at the University of Dubuque and I also serve as the Chairperson for the Dubuque Regional Airport Commission.

Air service, both Commercial and General Aviation, is the single most essential component in the new global economy. This is as true for Dubuque, Iowa as it is for Chicago or New York.

Let me introduce you to Dubuque.

Our economy has defied the odds over the past ten years. Progressive attitudes, capital investment, public-private cooperation and careful planning have been the ingredients for success that has resulted in unprecedented job growth. Moody's/Economy.com noted that Dubuque's employment growth remains "robust at triple the state and national paces." This respected firm added that Dubuque "has historically defied expectations" as development has staved off recessionary conditions. Forbes magazine places Dubuque in the U.S. Top 15 on its list of best places for business. In Iowa, Dubuque ranks number #1 for private sector job growth among Iowa's metro areas for the past twelve months.

Aviation Commercial Infrastructure

Aviation Commercial Infrastructure is critical for growing communities. Airports, traditionally, have been good economic engines when properly managed and supported. Major corporations who seek to establish a presence in a community need a robust transportation infrastructure. An airport with commercial service and facilities for business, charter, medical, and government air services is simply a necessity if a community is to succeed in global marketplace. The Dubuque Regional Airport serves local businesses as well as national corporations with "road warriors" traveling weekly to all parts of the United States, Europe and the Asia. McGraw Hill, John Deere, Prudential, McKesson Corporation and all our businesses require air connectivity to conduct their businesses. Eight higher education colleges and universities in the Tri-State Area also depend on commercial air service.

In 2000 the Dubuque Regional Airport had 59,000 enplanements and was served by 3 air carriers; American Eagle, United Express, and Northwest AirlinK serving three hubs (Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis). Today only American Eagle serves the Airport with four daily flights to Chicago and accounting for nearly 50,000 enplanements. In 2003, through the combination of a Small Community Air Service grant of \$610,000 and an organized, unified and well funded marketing campaign led by the local Chamber of Commerce, "FLY DBQ" was launched to increase frequency and passenger load – a "use it or lose it" proposition.

Additionally, the community supported the Airport with a \$250,000 travel bank. This successful grant was closed out in May 2006 and the fourth flight continues to this day.

Gaining additional air service has been, to date, nearly impossible to attain. Airlines continue to operate on very small margins and require strong incentives to take the risk of moving into a new community or reestablishing themselves in former communities. They continue to look for every operational advantage and revenue guarantees. In order for Dubuque to gain more frequency or gain access to additional hubs, air carriers are forced to sacrifice service to other communities. There are a multitude of factors which determine "who gets what." If it was purely actuarial crunching that delivered additional flights or carriers to small regional airports – little or no service would be provided to key rural regions of our country.

The City of Dubuque has done a magnificent job of developing the downtown area, the river, and local charm to enhance the tourism trade but has not spent a commensurate amount of time in establishing multiple ways of getting people here. One air carrier with 4 departures per day simply is not enough to entice easy access to and from other locales. Further, the ridership on our four flights is averaging in excess of 74% full. Limited capacity is making it difficult and costly to attain remaining seats and it precludes additional Tourism travel. If Dubuque is to grow; we need more access to this great and emerging community called Dubuque.

General Aviation

Rural and underserved communities require strong commitments from its general aviation activities to continue business growth and global reach. Medical flights today are even more important to underserved communities. Here at Dubuque we have seen an increase in business aircraft, charter flights, and owner operated aircraft to sustain viable growth. Transient as well as jet fuel purchases indicate an active market while fuel sales continue to decline from airline tankering policies. Dubuque is limited by its ability to grow its support of business aviation by its lack of hangar, ramp, and available office space. Enticing a quality charter operator or any other aviation business to the Dubuque is difficult. We must not forget that general aviation has become key to sustained growth of a community, yet funding for adequate infrastructure lags commercial air service funds. Rural and underserved communities may need funding in a different and non-traditional manner.

University Flight Programs

Currently University flight programs provide our nation with majority of qualified pilots being hired by the Regional airlines today. Demands for qualified pilots are the highest since 2000. The level of hiring of pilots by US airlines and international operators is forecast to remain robust and the majority of hires will come from university flight programs through at least 2017. The University of Dubuque (UD) is not-for-profit private institution of higher education conducting flight training from its base at the Dubuque Regional Airport. UD's Aviation programs have over 210 students, with 23 multi and single-engine aircraft and a staff of 35.

The University of Dubuque is the only bachelor degree institution in Iowa offering professional aeronautics and aviation management training in the State of Iowa. UD is one of approximately 80 four-year degree granting institutions with aviation programs. The University of Dubuque has a nationally recognized program based on its high standards as recognized by the Aviation Accreditation Board International, its high job placement rate, and its arrangements with key employers like American Eagle Airlines with which UD has a preferred hire agreement.

I remain very concerned about the cost our students must incur to become professional pilots and the access to the aviation infrastructure necessary to train the World's safest pilot workforce. Reasonable fuel prices and access to energy alternatives for aviation fuels is a critical need. The US is the world leader in aviation training. We need to protect this capability and maintain our leadership and opportunities for our pilot workforce. Post-graduate training programs and for profit flight training remain sensitive to the potential of user fee volatility and higher fuel taxes. Protecting the United States' ability to train the next generation of airline and business pilots is critical.

Contract ATC Towers

Contract ATC towers remain essential to ensure safety and support for growing and emerging high performance communities. Today, the Dubuque Regional Airport is fast approaching the second busiest airport, based on flight operations, in the State of Iowa. The fielding of Next Gen and other key ATC technologies will only enhance the safety in Dubuque and other locations.

A recent incident with a University of Dubuque student who became disoriented due to low clouds was helped by technology in an American Eagle aircraft on the ground because the tower did not have that same level of technology. Had the aircraft not been assisted by technology on the American Eagle aircraft – the outcome of the incident could have been quite different.

As communities change and grow, it appears that only Contract towers provide the flexibility to assist communities to provide safe air traffic management on relatively short notice to abate air traffic issues. Contract ATC towers clearly contribute to the opportunity for further business, commercial air traffic growth, and the improvement of safety in the aviation infrastructure.

Conclusion

The City of Dubuque and its Airport Commission have been proactive in attempting to secure the best value for its citizens and surrounding communities. Support to rural/underserved communities' aviation infrastructure is critical for market access, employment, growth, safety, and quality of life issues. Funding is necessary and deserving for Iowa's communities.

I would like to thank Senator Grassley for giving Dubuque an opportunity to share its story.