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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

September 14, 2016

The Honorable Anthony Foxx  
Secretary  
United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx:

Congress recently passed, and the president signed into law, the bipartisan Federal Aviation Administration Extension, Safety, and Security Act (P.L. 114-190). The strong, bipartisan support for this bill is a reflection of the work we did to incorporate provisions that were critical to safety or security, or were time-sensitive.

Among these priorities, this legislation directs the establishment of a working group on maintaining and improving air service to small communities. The working group, made up of various small community and aviation stakeholders, as well as local and state officials, including Governors, is tasked with identifying obstacles to attracting and maintaining air service and ultimately developing recommendations to address these issues. As described in the law, Congress is interested in learning the views of the working group on the federal, state, and local resources necessary to ensure continued connectivity to and from small communities. Importantly, among the issues to be reviewed, are initiatives to support improved pilot training, which would increase both aviation safety and pilot supply, both critical to reliable air service.

As you know, the implementation of first officer qualifications rules has, among other factors, played a role in the availability of reliable air service in small communities. Without question, this requirement was enacted to raise the bar when it comes to safety in aviation, but it has had unintended effects, and nowhere are these impacts felt more acutely than in small communities in South Dakota and across the country. The working group will gather relevant stakeholders to have a public-facing conversation about how to improve safety *and* service. Safety is best assured when government, industry, and other stakeholders work together, and I am hopeful that proposals to improve aviation safety through enhanced pilot training will be considered and lead to lasting solutions.

I am requesting that you act expeditiously to assemble this working group and set deadlines for its recommendations. Rural communities around the country that have lost, or are being faced with losing, commercial service cannot afford to wait.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Thune", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOHN THUNE  
Chairman