

A New Airport?

Confidential Instructions for the Senator from Tidal Flats County (Democrat)

You are in a delicate position in this negotiation because your constituency is sharply divided. One group includes many of the businesses and individuals who profit directly or indirectly from the presence of Curly Airport in Tidal Flats. They are strongly opposed to state funding of a new airport to replace Curly, which they believe would bring an abrupt end to the benefits they gain from its presence. This group is well organized, well-funded, and outspoken in its opposition to a new airport. It is due to its activities that the public view — and probably the view of the other Senators on the Committee — is that you will vote no on any proposal for a new airport.

There are, however, two groups of constituents who are urging you to support a new airport. One group consists of those county residents who live near the airport, and who have been complaining for years about the noise of aircraft passing overhead as well as about the pollution resulting from those aircraft. In the past, this group has not been powerful enough to have any significant effect on discussions about Curly's future, but it has been strengthened by the many Eastport University faculty members who have moved to Tidal Flats in recent years (because of the high cost of Eastport housing), and who take a passionate interest in the environment. This group, in addition to complaining about airport noise and pollution, is concerned about the negative effect of Curly on the wetlands to the east of the airport, which it views as an increasingly important ecological treasure that needs to be restored and protected in an era of rising seas.

Finally, there exists a third group, composed of influential business persons in Tidal Flats (including many leaders of the Chamber of Commerce). It is the view of this group that Curly's days are numbered, regardless of whether or not the pending proposal for a new airport succeeds. As Curly's limited capacity becomes more and more of a check on its ability to serve Eastport, and the exorbitant costs of expanding Curly become more and more evident, Tidal Flats' power to defeat a new airport proposal will decrease. Hence, this group believes that if Tidal Flats wants to receive significant benefits in exchange for its support of a new airport, now is the time to negotiate. They also believe that in the medium and long term, the county's economic development will have more upside potential by using the land at Curly's prime location for other kinds of business and residential activity.

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You tend to agree with the political analysis of this third group, although for reasons of both negotiation strategy and constituent relations, you have not revealed that publicly. Although you are not certain how the other members of the Committee will vote, you think that there is at least a possibility of two “no” votes. One such vote might come from Serenity County, which is located next to Pancake County, and whose well-to-do residents are unlikely to be pleased at the prospect of the airplane noise, air pollution, and increased automobile traffic that would result from an adjacent airport. A second “no” could come from Faraway County, which is sufficiently distant from the proposed Pancake County airport that such an airport is unlikely to provide it with any significant benefit. If either Faraway or Serenity County votes no, the Chair will need Tidal Flats to have the 5-county majority it needs. Under these circumstances, you should be able to obtain from the Chair and other airport supporters sufficient benefits for Tidal Flats in exchange for its support of a new airport that agreement on such an airport will be regarded as a great victory by many of your constituents, and at least palatable to the remainder. In the alternative, if you are not satisfied with the benefits offered in exchange for a “yes” vote, you should be able to vote against the new airport in good conscience and with a solid explanation for your constituents, even if that sinks the airport project.

You presently intend to seek, in exchange for a vote in favor of the new airport:

1. \$125 million in state aid for redeveloping Curly as a small, all-business and private aircraft airport. Doing so would be popular with those currently doing business at Curly, as well as with Tidal Flats businesses and professionals who would retain the advantages of a nearby airport. Your informal conversations with some of the likely tenants of a redeveloped Curly Airport have indicated that they would not object to reasonable limitations on airport capacity, hours of operation, and airplane flight paths, all of which would reduce the concerns that Curly neighbors have had with the existing airport. This approach would also obviate the need for any runway extensions.
2. \$75 million in state aid for turning the rest of Curly’s former footprint into a business park, anchored by the new biotech research center, but also suitable for start-ups and other small and medium-sized businesses, as well as some commercial and retail space. Without a prominent anchor to attract people to the business center, its chances of success will be markedly less, and the new biotech research center would be ideal as such an anchor, with its 500-600 employees and a stream of visitors.
3. Tidal Flats is more than qualified to be the site of the new biotech research center. To be successful, the new research center must be appealing to top researchers, and Tidal Flats fulfills that need. The prestigious Eastport universities are essentially next door, providing both colleagues and graduate student assistants for researchers at the center. Furthermore, Tidal Flats is an appealing place for professionals to live, as the recent influx of Eastport University faculty to Tidal Flats makes plain. Tidal Flats’ residential appeal will become even greater when the wetlands restoration plan you propose (see below) is underway.
4. In order to ensure the support of environmentalists in Tidal Flats County (as well as across the state), you will seek a substantial environmental grant (\$50 million this year, plus \$12.5 million a year for the next four years) to repair the wetlands damage done by Curly in the past, and to develop the wetlands as a tourist attraction where visitors could view migrating birds and animals that thrive in healthy wetlands.

As far as the proposals contained in SB 101, including those that direct the ATA to study various options, you have no objection to any of them, with the exception of Emerald County's request for a tunnel under the Ames River. The \$500 million cost of such a tunnel is higher than any other transportation expenditure, and even without the tunnel, the residents of Emerald County will have high-speed road and rail access to the new airport. Additionally, funding the Emerald County \$500 million tunnel would very likely lead to a sizeable budget deficit, making the funding you seek impossible. In sum, you will support the \$500 million tunnel proposal only if all of your proposals are funded, and the new biotech research center is sited in Tidal Flats County.

On the remaining issues, you are inclined to tell the Senators from Serenity, Pancake, and Faraway that you will support their health and transportation proposals if they will support your proposals for Tidal Flats. (In fact, you will vote against the Serenity-Pancake-Faraway proposals if the Committee Chair asks you to do so in exchange for his/her support of your demands for Tidal Flats).

Your Interests and Priorities

Your central interest is to obtain an outcome that will be regarded as a victory by your constituents. You are confident that an agreement for a new airport will do that if it satisfies all your demands, including the siting of the new biotech research center. You further believe, although with less certainty, that if you refuse to accept an offer that does not assure a solid future for a redeveloped Curly, you will be regarded by your constituents as having made the right choice.

Ultimately, in considering whether to vote for any proposed agreement for a new airport, you will have to decide whether that agreement, considered as a whole, contains provisions which would satisfy your constituents' interests more than would the "no deal" alternative.