

A New Airport?

Confidential Instructions for the Senator from Eastport County (Democrat), Committee Chair

Your goal in this negotiation is to get an agreement for a new airport in Pancake County. You are the senior politician representing Eastport, you have championed this issue since your first election as mayor of Eastport 20 years ago, and an agreement is long overdue. The delay is now holding back the economic development of the entire state. Moreover, failure might jeopardize your reelection, as you may be facing a challenge from a popular state representative likely to argue that it's time for "new energy and new blood."

Because you strongly believe in the importance of a new airport, you will tend to support any proposed amendment to SB 101 that increases the likelihood of the Committee reporting out a new airport bill that will be accepted by the legislature. The major constraint on your support is budgetary. The legislative leadership has made it clear that it will not approve a bill providing for deficit spending, and as a practical matter, you are bound by that limitation.

Additionally, you will not, as a general rule, support amendments that are unrelated to the airport. Whatever the merit of such proposals, Committee approval of them is likely to lead to challenges in the legislature that they are in the bill primarily to obtain the vote of Committee member(s) supporting them, and that there is no legitimate reason to grant benefits to counties represented on the Committee that are not made available to all counties. Such challenges could both threaten legislative passage of SB 101 and tarnish your reputation for integrity, a reputation that you prize.

As far as the proposals contained in SB 101, including those that direct the ATA to study various options, you support all of them to the extent they can all be funded within the annual \$500 million budget surplus. Most deal with increasing access to the new airport, and maximum access is consistent with serving the citizens of Ames and insuring a profitable airport. The access proposal that is most likely to be subject to attack on budgetary grounds is Emerald'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

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tunnel, the residents of Emerald County will have high-speed road and rail access to the new airport. You will support the tunnel proposal if it does not create a budget deficit; otherwise you will have to oppose it, hoping that you can persuade the Senator from Emerald County, a long-time friend and supporter, that even without the tunnel, Emerald's interests will be better served by having a new airport with easy access from Emerald County than by continuing to rely on Curly.

The only financial proposal in the bill that is not for airport access relates to redeveloping Curly, and doing so is entirely appropriate, as the citizens of Tidal Flats should not be subject to the costs of restoring land that the state took to build an airport serving the citizens of all counties.

As for the proposed amendments to S.B. 101, your views are these:

Roads and Public Transit for Faraway, Pancake, and Serenity Counties

You are opposed to all these proposals. They may be worthwhile, but they have nothing to do with the airport, and would lead to the types of attack discussed above. There is little to be gained in getting a bill approved by the Committee if it is rejected by the legislature on the grounds that it serves primarily the interests of the counties represented on the Committee, not the citizens of all counties.

The sole exception to your opposition to the road and transit amendments relates to the Faraway County proposal for a low-cost transit system based on the use of minivans, rather than conventional buses. The costs of experimenting with such a system for a few years are slight, and if it is successful, it could be rolled out more generally for the benefit of all counties not served or underserved by public transit. Indeed, you could state that if a pilot program test of such a system is promising, you will introduce a bill to provide state financing of the system wherever in the state it could be a cost-effective means of serving the transit needs of Ames citizens.

Health Care for Faraway, Pancake, and Serenity Counties

Your reaction to the various health care proposals is similar to your reaction to most of the road and transit proposals. You realize that the opioid epidemic, which is the concern underlying those proposals, is a major problem, both in human and financial terms, but you are unwilling to respond to that concern in a bill aimed at resolving the airport problem. If the Senators sponsoring the health care proposals are genuinely concerned about dealing with the opioid epidemic, you are willing to sponsor a bill to establish a state-supported opioid research effort, if those same Senators are willing to be co-sponsors.

Biotech Research Center

Although the selection of a site for the biotech research center will not be included in the airport bill, it is certain to be a subject of discussion among Committee members. And, since both of the final candidates for the research center – Emerald City and Tidal Flats – are represented on the Committee, it is almost equally certain that the siting decision will play a role in the airport negotiations. It is simply too tempting as trading material to be ignored. Accordingly, you have thought hard about what position you should take on this issue.

Ultimately, it is your view that Emerald City and Tidal Flats are equally qualified to host the center. Emerald City is the home of several colleges and universities with highly respected science departments; Tidal Flats adjoins Eastport County, which is a renowned center of scientific research, mostly based at 2-3 world-class universities. (It is unclear why Eastport is not a candidate for the center; your speculation is that the universities could not agree on which of them should serve as center host, and that the Mayor of Eastport was unwilling to select one, rather than the other.)

Whatever the reason for Eastport's absence from the competition, in view of the equal qualifications of Emerald City and Tidal Flats, and your primary interest in getting agreement on a new airport, your decision which of them to support will be predicated on the effect of your support in bringing about such an agreement — and that you will not know until you see how the negotiations develop. (If your decision on this issue will not affect the outcome of the airport negotiations, you will support placing the center in Tidal Flats because of its proximity to the existing scientific research community in Eastport.)

Other Issues

Your position on any issues that arise unexpectedly should be governed by your primary interest in reaching an airport agreement that will be supported by at least five Committee members and will be passed by the state legislature.

In terms of process, it has occurred to you that not all discussions during this meeting need to occur in plenary session. Indeed it may be more efficient to work at times in smaller groupings, and it may be easier for you to get information or float options speaking to others one-on-one or one-on-two.

You should also be aware of the limited time available to the Committee to discuss and vote on S.B. 101. In your role as Committee Chair, you should have a plan for how you will move Committee members from a discussion of individual issues to a discussion and vote on an overall airport agreement that will (1) have the support of 5 Committee members, (2) stay within the \$500 million annual budget, and (3) be accepted by the state legislature. Doing so may require that you make use of all the skills you have acquired in your many years as an Ames state senator.