

A New Airport?

Confidential Instructions for the Senator from Serenity County (Republican) Ranking Minority Member

The great majority of your constituents (including the bulk of your funders and supporters) oppose a new airport in Pancake County. A good portion of the county is rural, devoted to farming, timber, horses, country homes, and tourism, with a thriving network of small hotels, B&Bs, and garden inns. For these folks, an airport nearby offers few or no benefits. To the contrary, the noise and environmental pollution of airplanes flying at low altitude as they take off from an international airport just across the county line in Pancake is viewed by many of them as threatening their livelihoods.

All in all, you will be seen as a hero if you are able to engineer a no-agreement outcome to this negotiation. But that will require finding a way to get at least one other Senator to vote against the new airport. Your staff's analysis suggests that the most likely "no" votes would come from Tidal Flats County, which will lose the economic benefits of Curly Airport if it is replaced; Faraway County, which is too far away from a new airport in Pancake County to benefit much from it, even with better access; and even Pancake County itself, since its population, many of whom are farmers, may not be thrilled at the prospect of being the site of a major new international airport. Additionally, Faraway and Pancake are rural counties like Serenity, and may have other interests in common with Serenity. Accordingly, you will connect early with the Senators from each of these counties to see who might be willing to join you in a "no" vote.

Of course the danger of open opposition to a new airport is that if you are not successful in blocking it, other Committee members may decide to approve a new airport without any consideration of the interests of your constituents. That could be a disastrous outcome for both the County and you personally. So your challenge is somehow to maximize the chances of no agreement while ensuring that if any agreement is reached, it meets your county's interests to the extent possible.

Perhaps the best strategy for walking this tightrope would be to maintain a public position of seriously considering backing a new airport if the needs of Serenity County are sufficiently taken into account. Surely it would be unfair to ignore the needs of a county that will be significantly impacted by a new airport next door, when those needs could be satisfied at a small fraction of the cost of building the new airport.

This set of confidential instructions was written by Stephen Goldberg and Bruce Patton for the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (HKS) as part of the "Teaching Legislative Negotiation Project." Funding for this exercise was provided by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. HKS exercises are developed solely as the basis for classroom use. They are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

Copyright © 2019 President and Fellows of Harvard College.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

High on the list of Serenity County needs that could be met by the Committee is an improved transportation system. Despite being the second largest county in the state (by land area), as well as having hilly, difficult-to-access terrain, Serenity County has many roads and bridges in need of upgrades, and no public transit system. These factors limit development and job opportunities. \$50 million for road and bridge repair would be useful, as would a public transit system, which would expand job opportunities and otherwise ease life for many poorer and older residents of Serenity County. Your inquiries have indicated that an adequate public transit system could be set up with an initial expenditure of \$40-60 million to purchase buses, and a subsequent annual operating subsidy of \$20 - 30 million. (You would be willing to accept the proposed Faraway County plan to use minivans for public transportation in lieu of your plan, if the Faraway system were more appealing to the Committee.)

Health care is another critical area of need. Serenity County has only one small hospital and no community clinics at all. Both the hospital's emergency department and many primary care doctors are completely overwhelmed dealing with the opioid epidemic. Health care in Serenity County could be improved dramatically by building 3 community clinics to expand capacity, ease access, and reduce the burden on the hospital's emergency room. This would require a one-time investment of \$50 million, plus ongoing annual operating support of \$25 million. You also join in Faraway County's request for \$10 million annually to institute a program of opioid addiction prevention and treatment, and will support the requests of both Faraway and Pancake for other health care assistance.

In view of the common concerns of Serenity, Pancake, and Faraway Counties, you might suggest that Pancake and Faraway join you in advising the Committee Chair that you will support a new airport only if your demands for state aid for transportation and health care are met (even though ultimately you will not support the airport even if these demands are met).

As far as the proposals contained in SB 101, including those that direct the ATA to study various options, you will support all of them, hoping that by doing so, you will gather support for your demands on transportation and health care. There is likely to be opposition to the Tidal Flats request for funds for redeveloping Curly, based on the view of some Senators that Tidal Flats has profited greatly over the years from the presence of Curly, and it should not be necessary for residents of other counties to pay for the costs associated with redeveloping Curly. Still, you will support Tidal Flats on this issue, hoping that will ensure Tidal Flats' support of your transportation and health care demands. Additionally, if the Committee does not provide the funds Tidal Flats seeks, Tidal Flats may reward your loyalty by voting with you against the new airport.

Other Issues

You don't really care where the state sites a new biotech research center, but you can vote in such a way as to increase the obstacles to reaching an agreement. If, for example, this is a crucial issue for Emerald County, and you vote for placing the center in Tidal Flats, that might lead Emerald to vote against the airport. That, together with your vote, would result in the absence of a 5-person majority. Similarly, if the issue is crucial for Tidal Flats, and you vote for placing the center in Emerald, that could lead Tidal Flats

to vote against the airport, also making a 5-person majority impossible. Perhaps you should see how the discussion progresses before deciding how to vote on this issue.

Negotiation Dynamics

Knowing how important process is to negotiation outcomes, especially when there are multiple parties, one approach that might help meet your goal of blocking agreement is to focus on promoting plausible, but unhelpful processes. For example, you might invite people to share their key “must-haves” early on in negotiation with the ostensible purpose of “mapping the terrain of interests,” but actually hoping to lock parties into irreconcilable positions. Or you could promote polarizing frames, for example, by asking to discuss criteria by which to decide whose interests should be “sacrificed” and whose should “prevail.” Perhaps you could even volunteer to facilitate!

Summary of Your Interests

In sum, although your public position is likely to be that of supporting the new airport if the legitimate demands of Serenity County are met, your central interest is in blocking the airport, and you have several tools at your disposal to do so. A secondary interest, if you are unable to block the airport, is that any airport agreement provides Serenity County with funding for road repair, public transit, and health care assistance.

Post-negotiation Negotiation!

If the new airport is approved despite your “no” vote, and there is any benefit that Serenity County demanded but did not receive, and other Committee members did receive (public transit financing, for example), you should consider telling the Chair, after the vote approving the airport, that you will change your vote to “yes” in exchange for him/her meeting your demand. If your demand would not result in a budget deficit, satisfying it would appear to be win-win – the Chair gets a unanimous vote for the airport, which should help in obtaining legislative approval, and you get an additional benefit for your constituents. Worth trying!