November 18, 2002

The Honorable Trent Lott  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Lott:

As leaders in the nation's aerospace and aeronautics community, we strongly urge you to support S.2951, the Federal Aviation Administration Research, Engineering and Development Act. This bipartisan bill was introduced by Sens. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), Fritz Hollings (D-SC), and John McCain (R-AZ).

S.2951 calls for essential increases in the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) budget for research, engineering, and development activities for projects including aviation safety, improving efficiency of the air traffic control system, reducing the environmental impact of aviation, and improving the efficiency of mission support.

In their second interim report released earlier this year, the congressionally mandated “President’s Commission on the Future of the U.S. Aerospace Industry,” noted “aviation is responsible for more than $1 trillion in U.S. economic activity, employs nearly 11 million workers, and aviation products lead the development and use of advanced technologies.” The Commission recommended the Administration and Congress provide significant increases in FAA and NASA R&D and “develop a new 21st Century air transportation system for the nation.”

We concur with the Commission’s recommendations and strongly support the provisions of S.2951 requiring the “FAA Administrator, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator, and the Under Secretary of Transportation for Security (TSA) to coordinate a civil aviation research and development (R&D) plan,” and directing the “FAA to work with NASA to develop a blueprint for the creation of an innovative air traffic management system that will meet the long-term aviation security, safety and capacity needs of the United States.”

In recent years, our organizations have expressed concern that reducing federal funding for aviation R&D will jeopardize the nation's leadership in providing the technologies needed to develop the next generation aircraft, improve aviation safety and security, and attracting the next generation of aviation scientists and engineers.
The Commission’s third interim report released June 26, 2002, revealed several negative conditions/trends impacting the aerospace industrial base, including:

- U.S. civil transport aircraft market share declining;
- NASA, FAA research funding in decline;
- No U.S. regional jet production;
- Serious air traffic control challenges, airport saturation; and
- Foreign government sponsored competitors.

Assuring the nation's ability to develop innovative technologies to inhibit future terrorist usurpation of the nation's air transportation system, as well as to develop advanced technologies for defense is of paramount importance. Our nation’s national security depends on aviation.

As we approach the centennial of the Wright Brothers' first flight, it is more important than ever that America renew its national commitment to leadership in aviation. In order to do so, we must ensure the strength and stability of the nation’s aviation infrastructure by formulating and committing to a national aviation research and technology policy that incorporates adequate federal funding for visionary long-term aviation research.

We strongly urge your support of this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Kathryn Holmes at holmesk@asme.org or 202/785-3756, Ext. 390.

Sincerely,

Aerospace Industries Association
American Association of Engineering Societies
American Helicopter Society
American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
American Society of Civil Engineers
American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Aerospace Engineering Division
General Aviation Manufacturers Association
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers-U.S.A.
NASA Aeronautics Support Team
NASA Alumni League
Society of Automotive Engineers

(Sample of letter sent to all U.S. Senators)