

24,000 residents. The \$20 billion cost of expanding Gary would make it virtually impossible for an airline to charge reasonable fares, whereas, the cost of the Peotone site would result in ticket prices comparable to O'Hare.

The Proposed South Suburban Airport would be safer due to its parallel-runway design and ability for future growth. Further, the South Suburban Airport is less expensive than other options. The cost of an inaugural South Suburban Airport is approximately \$560 million, compared to \$1.5 billion for building one runway at O'Hare. The third airport can also be built sooner than adding an additional runway at O'Hare. The airport can be operational in 4 to 5 years, but it would take 8 to 15 years to design and build an additional runway at O'Hare. The South Suburban Airport would be cleaner than the existing airports as it would be sufficient in size to absorb noise and air pollution. It has road and rail access, but less ground congestion.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify why I missed Roll Call Votes on April 24, 2001 and to further explain the importance of the proposed South Suburban Airport.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNTY
GOVERNMENT

HON. JOE BARTON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 26, 2001

Mr. BARTON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in recognition of National County Government Week, I rise today to speak on the importance of county government and to highlight the numerous contributions county governments make in the everyday lives of citizens. Today, counties fill an especially challenging role as they continue to meet the complex demands of modern society.

In Texas, we have 254 counties that serve the needs of more than 18 million Texans. The responsiveness of county government to the needs of the community is a long-standing tradition in Texas. Texas law mandates, with certain exceptions, that all county courthouses be centrally located so that each citizen can travel to the seat, vote, and return home in a day. Most county seats fall within five miles of the county's center.

The structure of Texas county government has its roots in the "municipality," the local unit of government under Spanish and Mexican rule. These large areas, embracing one or more settlements and rural territories, are the foundation of the governmental organization of our present day counties. The Texas Constitution declared counties as the functional agents of the state, or as an "arm of the state." Unlike cities, the areas of responsibility authorized to counties are specifically spelled out in laws passed by the Legislature.

Texas counties range in size from less than 100 residents to more than three million. Major responsibilities include county development planning; building and maintaining roads and recreational facilities; and in some cases, county airports; constructing and operating jails; operating the judicial system; maintaining public records; collecting property taxes;

issuing vehicle registration and transfers; and registering voters. Counties also provide law enforcement, conduct elections and provide invaluable health and social services to indigent members of the community. In this way, the county structures, more than any other form of government, plays a central role in the everyday functions of communities.

At the heart of each county is the commissioners court. These members of the court collectively conduct the general business of the county and oversee financial matters. Each Texas county has four precinct commissioners and a county judge who serve on this court. Functions of the county, run by individuals employed by the commissioners court, include such departments as public health and human services, personnel and budget, and in some counties, public transportation and emergency medical services. Elected officials, found in most counties, include county attorneys, county and district clerks, county treasurers, sheriffs, tax assessor-collectors, justices of the peace, and constables.

In the last twenty years, a growing number of federal and state responsibilities have been delegated or mandated to the local level, confirming the importance and necessity of local county governments in Texas. Each day, counties deliver a long list of services and work to respond to the ever-changing needs of our dynamic state.

Counties across America provide solutions at the local level that help bring communities together. I believe this traditional form of local county government, which fulfills a multitude of services to communities, is truly indispensable to its citizens.

NATIONAL COUNTY GOVERNMENT
WEEK

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 26, 2001

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, in recognition of National County Government Week, I rise today to honor the contributions and achievements of our county governments.

We have the opportunity this week to reflect upon the importance of our county governments and show our appreciation for our county officials. As a former mayor, I am very familiar with the role of county government and the need for government at all levels to cooperate in order to best serve Americans, and I appreciate the hard work done at the county level.

I have the privilege of representing the three South Florida counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. These county governments serve a diverse population. This population is truly a microcosm of our state and our country. The needs facing these communities can be found in other parts of the country as well. County government has been successful in addressing these needs, and we in Congress can learn a lot from them.

The backbone of county government is the people who provide the vital services that are essential to our health, safety, and well-being. The school teachers, the social workers, the

firefighters, the police, and others who are devoting their lives to public service help form the fabric of our government.

County government is the government closest to the people. It is often the face of government to most of our population. It is our obligation as Members of Congress to help support county governments all across the country in order that they may more effectively serve Americans.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL TO MAKE
LEAF TOBACCO AN ELIGIBLE
COMMODITY FOR THE MARKET
ACCESS PROGRAM

HON. BOB ETHERIDGE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 26, 2001

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with my colleagues from other tobacco producing states to introduce a bill to put an end to discrimination against tobacco farmers. For almost eight years, hard-working, God-fearing, taxpaying tobacco farmers have been denied access to the funds provided by the federal Market Access Program, commonly known as MAP.

More than \$90 million in MAP funds are available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to promote U.S. agricultural products overseas. Under MAP, agricultural industry trade associations, cooperatives, and state or regional trade groups each year are invited to submit proposals to USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) to conduct approved foreign market development projects for various U.S. agricultural, fishery and forestry products. Examples include consumer promotions, market research, technical assistance, and trade servicing. MAP funds have been used to promote a wide range of products from sunflower seeds to catfish and cotton to hops for use in making beer.

Since 1993 USDA has been prohibited from using MAP funds to promote tobacco leaf sales overseas. This is patently unfair, and it is time for this discrimination to end. The future of American agriculture is tied to international trade. Currently, 25% of farmers' gross income comes from exports. The futures of thousands of Tar Heel tobacco farm families depend on exports, and I am not going to stand by and watch other commodities benefit from federal funds to access these markets while tobacco farmers are left out in the cold.

It is high time that tobacco is treated like the legal product that it is, and this legislation is a step in the right direction. I call on President Bush, Secretary Veneman, and my colleagues to support this bill and give our struggling tobacco farm families an opportunity to not just survive, but thrive.