



## WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Brian Schweitzer  
Governor of Montana  
Chairman

C.L. "Butch" Otter  
Governor of Idaho  
Vice Chairman

Pam O. Inmann  
Executive Director

Headquarters:  
1600 Broadway  
Suite 1700  
Denver, CO 80202  
  
303-623-9378  
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C. Office:  
400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.  
Suite 388  
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402  
Fax 202-624-7707

[www.westgov.org](http://www.westgov.org)

July 2, 2009

The Honorable Daniel Inouye, Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Herb Kohl, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Brownback, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Inouye, Cochran, Kohl and Brownback:

As the Committee considers the fiscal year 2010 appropriations bill for the Department of Agriculture and Related Agencies, the Western Governors' Association urges you to continue your past support for programs that are important to the citizens living in western states.

In its proposed budget, we appreciate the Obama Administration for supporting rural communities by providing \$1.3 billion in loans and grants to increase rural broadband service. We also support the Administration's funding for the promotion and development of bioenergy.

However, we are concerned by the Administration's proposed budget cuts to conservation programs. In particular, cuts to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program; Wetlands Reserve Program; and the Conservation Reserve Program. We are also concerned by the planned elimination of the Resource Conservation and Development Program that is important to state and local governments for conservation efforts. We hope the Committee will keep and fund these programs to the highest extent possible.

Also, with respect to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we are pleased with the request for \$10.928 million to operate the snow survey and water supply forecasting program, and particularly pleased with the additional \$4.95 million for converting manually measured snow courses to automated Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL) sites. Given water supply scarcity and

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variability in the West, which is largely dependent on our mountain snowpacks, real-time data is increasingly critical for agricultural and municipal uses, reservoir operations, flood warning and management, and protection of endangered species and other environmental values.

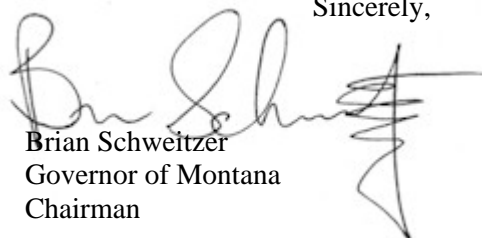
Similarly, the \$73 million requested for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill (a successor to the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program) will help fund partnerships aimed at addressing water quantity and water quality problems in the West and the Nation.

We are pleased with a proposal that would create a contingent funding reserve of \$282 million for the costs associated with wildfire. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, the nation has already experienced more wildland fires and more acres burned to date, than in the devastating 2000 wildfire season. Continued and increased financial assistance to western states and rural communities at risk from wildfire is greatly needed. Programs which support the goals of the National Fire Plan, such as the Forest Service State & Private Forestry program, are absolutely crucial to help ensure preparedness of local and state resources in the areas of prevention, hazardous fuels reduction and wildfire suppression. Improved communication and coordination by federal, state and local emergency response personnel has been the direct result of programs funded by State Fire Assistance.


Additionally, increased funding is needed for communities to develop infrastructure and economic stability in order to utilize biomass from local forests to create local renewable energy. Continued funding of programs which grant funds to state and local governments to develop community wood energy plans and finance new facilities, such as wood-burning systems for municipal heating and electricity is important. Rural communities can play a key role in reducing dependence on petroleum-based fuels, increasing energy independence, developing more local renewable energy supplies and creating new employment opportunities.

We hope the Committee will continue to support these programs that are of extraordinary importance to the West.

Sincerely,



Brian Schweitzer  
Governor of Montana  
Chairman



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Vice Chairman