



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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January 27, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Rm. 7W301
Washington DC 20472

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W., Room 6151
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretaries Vilsack, Salazar, Duncan and Napolitano:

We are writing to urge you to support a multi-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (SRSCA P.L. 106-393). If the Act is not reauthorized, it will result in severe budget cuts to education and jobs programs and to vital services in rural counties, communities and schools.

When the National Forest System was created in 1907, Congress recognized that communities located in these areas would be deprived of opportunities for economic development and much-needed tax revenues. With this in mind, an agreement was reached that clearly promised benefits to rural communities and that agreement should not be broken now. Ten years ago, Congress recognized the adverse consequences of declining timber sales and agreed to provide annual safety-net payments to support counties, schools and roads based on historic timber revenue levels between 1986 and 1999.

The revenue sharing provisions of SRSCA are vital but, just as importantly, it provides support for federal and non-federal emergency response, wildfire mitigation, habitat improvement and watershed restoration. In 2008, the modifications to Title III of the SRSCA reauthorization exemplified the importance of building community capacity through the development of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The CWPP collaborative process is effective in improving coordination and communication between emergency response agencies and the community, regardless of the event.

Our rural communities are already facing a fiscal deficit due to higher unemployment and reduced revenue-sharing from our federal lands. Severely declining payments threaten serious harm in 2011 for many

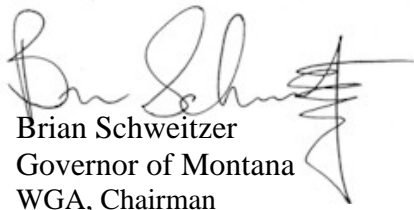
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communities, and financial collapse in 2012, when payments will end altogether without reauthorization. Schools and counties will be forced to: terminate hundreds of thousands of county employees; cancel thousands of teacher contracts; close hundreds of libraries; and curtail or eliminate sheriff patrols, rescue operations, mental health care services and substance abuse programs. In fact, some counties and school districts will consider filing for bankruptcy.

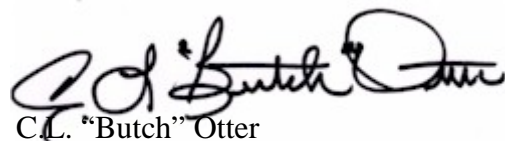
Sadly, many rural communities are already experiencing high poverty rates and this correlates to a high need for substance abuse treatment and mental health care services. Today, the SRSCA aids over 9 million school children in 4,400 school districts in 39 states. Stresses on service delivery capabilities are already resulting from declining SRSCA payments, with substantial additional declines each year, including a very steep drop in funding for fiscal year 2011. Without reauthorization of the SRSCA before 2012, these needs will go completely unmet in 2012 and beyond. Western Governors recognize that the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act is an integral part of the states' and rural counties' ability to deliver public services to thousands of communities throughout the nation.

The Western Governors' Association supports efforts that will ensure forest-dependent counties continue to receive a fair share of guaranteed revenue. We strongly urge you to make a commitment this year to include a reauthorization of the SRSCA in President Obama's FY 2012 budget. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
WGA, Chairman



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