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July 31, 2007

The Honorable Nick Rahall
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall:

On behalf of all of our colleagues in the Western Governors' Association, we are writing to express our deep gratitude for your leadership in seeking to reauthorize and fully fund the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-393) and the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program. These are critical programs for the Western states and we urge you to move legislation that fully funds these two programs through your Committee as expeditiously as possible.

As you know, P.L. 106-393 expired at the end of September 2006 endangering payments to over 600 counties and 4400 school districts in 39 states. In addition to reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools program, there is an urgent need to further benefit these rural communities by fully funding, for the first time ever, the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, which provides general funds to 49 states. Rural communities have relied on these programs to provide stable funding for rural schools, health care, law enforcement and other critical programs.

The elimination of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act would default on the 100 year old federal commitment to our rural communities that depend on these payments to keep their communities strong and stable. Fully funding PILT would provide much needed economic stability for the rural communities that support our public lands.

Thank you again for all of your efforts. We look forward to working with you on Western issues in the future.

Sincerely,

Dave Freudenthal
Governor of Wyoming
WGA Chair

Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.
Governor of Utah
WGA Vice-Chair