



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
Chairman

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

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September 22, 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 Robert Byrd, Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable George Voinovich, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As Congress completes its consideration of the fiscal year 2010 Homeland Security appropriations bill, the Western Governors' Association encourages you to continue your past support for the programs that are important to citizens in the Western states.

Under the Merida Initiative, Congress has provided substantial resources to assist the Government of Mexico in their effort to bring drug cartels and other criminals to justice. However, given the degree to which spillover violence is increasing in the Western states, Congress should direct additional resources to our federal, state and local law enforcement and border security agencies to address this troubling issue. Specifically, additional resources are needed to support arms-trafficking task forces to stop the flow of illegal weapons into Mexico and human-trafficking task forces that identify these heinous criminals and provide a safe harbor to victims.

As such, we ask Congress to continue its support and fund efforts that would help states address the complex issues connected to immigration and border security. We are pleased that both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees plan to fund Customs and Border

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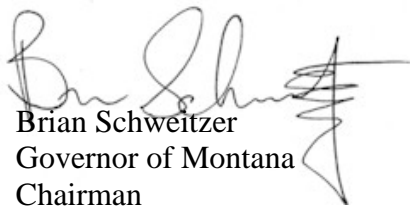
Protection efforts at \$10 billion and Immigration and Customs Enforcement at \$5.4 billion. We are particularly pleased with the \$3.5 billion the Committees have allotted to fully fund 20,019 Border Patrol agents, of whom 17,000 will be based on the Southwest border. We also appreciate the proposed \$60 million to reimburse state and local entities for border security efforts under Operation Stonegarden.

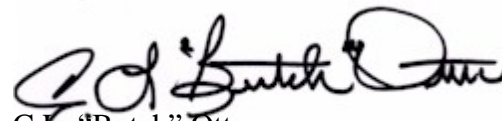
As relates to forestry, the Governors would like to establish an increased level of coordination and involvement between the state forestry agencies and FEMA grant administration and implementation. State forestry agencies have wildfire and fuels assessment information which are currently being used for USDA–Forest Service and DOI hazardous fuels reduction grant awards. This information has been developed by emergency managers, local fire service and state fire and fuels specialists which are most familiar with the high wildfire risk areas within their jurisdictions. Directing FEMA to collaborate with state agencies would provide for more informed decisions when allocating hazardous fuels reduction grants, such as FEMA Pre-disaster Mitigation Grants. Most states have established extensive collaborative groups to conduct evaluation and prioritization for the limited financial resources available to mitigate these hazards. Improving coordination with the states would also provide for an increase in coordination with local fire service and communities.

We applaud the development of the FEMA Fire Station Construction grants and support it's continuation beyond ARRA funding. Many western Community Wildfire Protection Plans have indicated the need for financial assistance to construct emergency response sub-stations, thus providing a quicker response to suppress fire starts and reducing the overall risk to communities and local infrastructure. Building local capacity in rural communities has clearly improved local response resulting in smaller fires and reduction of suppression costs nationally. The need for improved coordination is spelled out in the goals in the 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy – National Fire Plan and the recommendations in the report titled The Changing Role and Needs of Local, Rural, and Volunteer Fire Departments in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

In closing, we hope Congress will continue to invest in these important priorities.

Sincerely,


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The Honorable David Obey, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Price, Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives:

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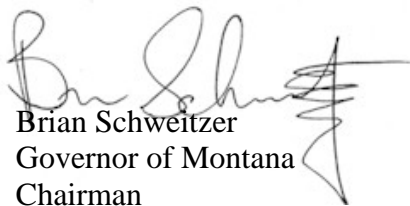
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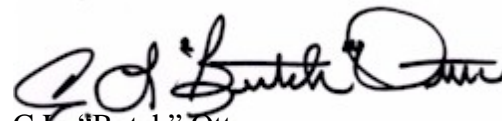
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