

### *House will Vote to Extend Program June 3<sup>rd</sup>*

Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) announced today that the House of Representatives will vote on legislation to fund critical county payments on June 3, 2008.

“Today’s news that the House of Representatives will finally vote on extending the Secure Rural Schools program comes as a welcome step in our on-going fight to continue the successful and critical county payments program. For years, my main focus has been finding a way to ensure these payments continue, to keep rural schools open, roads maintained, and law enforcement patrolling,” DeFazio said. “Given the looming economic disaster facing Oregon without an extension of federal county payments, this vote could not be more timely. I thank Speaker Pelosi and the House Democratic leadership for bringing this important measure to the House floor.”

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, Congressman DeFazio is expected to offer H.R. 3058, the Public Land Communities Transition Act, which would provide a four-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Program. The legislation will include a change to the payment disbursement formula, transition payments to several states including Oregon, and will ramp down payments by 10% per year, through 2012. The legislation will be fully paid-for by closing a loophole in oil and gas leases.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act expired in 2006 on President Bush’s watch with a Republican-controlled Congress. Last year, the Democratic Congress gave counties a one-year extension while Congress continued to work on a longer-term solution. The county payments program provides nearly \$280 million a year to 33 Oregon counties for critical services like schools, roads and law enforcement. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally-owned lands. Prior to the enactment of the county payments program, they had received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy. Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act in 2000 to help stabilize these payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.

DeFazio and other members of the Oregon delegation are attempting to get an extension

included in the Emergency Supplemental spending bill for the War in Iraq. However, the President has said he will veto supplemental funding for anything other than the war in Iraq and world hunger. The June 3rd vote on a free standing bill will provide an alternative funding option in case the president forces leaders to strip the funding from the Emergency Supplemental spending bill.