

WASHINGTON, DC –Congressman Peter DeFazio (OR-04) and Rep. Travis Childers (D-MS) led a bi-partisan letter signed by 68 House members in sending a letter to President Obama asking him to include a long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act (SRSCA) in the President’s 2012 budget. The Senate sent a similar letter to President Obama signed by 26 senators.

The SRSCA provides funding to 33 Oregon counties for law enforcement, schools, and other vital services. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally owned lands. Prior to enactment of the county payments program, counties received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990’s due to changes in federal forest policy. Congress passed the SRSCA in 2000 to help stabilize these payments and ensure adequate funding for vital county services.

The SRSCA expired on President Bush’s watch with a Republican controlled Congress in 2006. In 2007 the Democratic controlled Congress gave counties a one year-extension. And in 2008, Congress approved a four year extension with phased-down funding levels. If the program is not extended, Oregon counties will be forced to dramatically cut vitals services and face significant job losses.

“Without a meaningful long-term solution to Secure Rural Schools funding, counties in Southwest Oregon will be forced to lay off employees by the hundreds into a bad economy and cut vital services,” DeFazio said. “We will lose sheriff patrols, jail beds, teachers and other critical services. This would be devastating to timber dependent communities where the real unemployment rate is already over 20 percent. The President was clear on the campaign trail that he supported a long-term solution to county payments. I intend to remind him of his promise to help provide financial security and economic predictability to rural communities in Oregon.”

The text of the letter is below:

July 15, 2010 President Barack Obama The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We respectfully request that you include a long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act (SRSCA), and the concomitant funding, in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 budget request to Congress.

The SRSCA is not an entitlement program, but rather a demonstration of the commitment that this nation made to rural forest counties when they determined that large blocks (193 million acres in total) of our forest lands should be set aside for the benefit of the entire nation. Indeed this “contract” between the federal government and rural America is part of the very foundation of our national forest system. President Theodore Roosevelt understood the value of conserving our forest lands and placing them in public trust. He likewise understood the economic burden this placed on rural counties to provide essential infrastructure like roads and public schools with their tax revenues reduced by the presence of federal lands in these counties.

To mitigate these economic effects, President Roosevelt and Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot supported a revenue sharing concept that made forest counties a contracted business partner with the federal government. In 1908, Congress approved a revenue sharing plan specifying 25 percent of all revenues from National Forests would be returned to forested counties. This law worked well for nearly a century. However, by the late 1980’s national policies and court rulings substantially diminished revenue generating activity in our national forests. By 1998, revenues for national forest counties had declined by over 70 percent. The decline had a devastating impact on 780 counties nationwide and over nine million school children.

Recognizing its obligation to rural America, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act of 2000, and President Bill Clinton signed the bill. It

provided six years of funding. In 2007, Congress extended the SRSCA for one year. In 2008, Congress once again provided a four year extension of the SRSCA from 2008-2011.

Timber harvests have not rebounded, so both the logic and the need for this program remain as strong today as when President Roosevelt first supported revenue sharing. The vast majority of the funds provided through the SRSCA are used to directly fund jobs in road maintenance and public works and positions within the public school system. These are essential services for the citizens of these rural communities and constitute family-wage earner jobs.

Failure to extend the SRSCA in 2012 would have a devastating impact on the economies of over 780 of our most rural and most economically depressed counties and school districts across the nation. In these counties, unemployment is higher than in other regions of the country with rates approaching those experienced in the Great Depression.

Failure to extend the SRSCA would lead to an annual payment loss of 468 million dollars starting in 2012-13. The economic impacts will be ongoing without an extension. This includes support for construction, roads, education, conservation, and various other government funded services and projects. The loss of the funding leads to various businesses throughout the United States, mainly in rural America, losing on an annual basis almost \$1.37 billion in revenues, government at all levels losing over \$188 million in tax receipts and over 11,000 people losing their jobs in 2012-13.

In addition, Title II of the SRSCA has proven to be a substantial asset to rural communities and our forested public lands. Since 2000, in a very collaborative process, over \$350 million has been invested in watershed restoration and forest health projects by Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). Not one project has been appealed or litigated. In fact, based on changes in the 2008 Act, the number of RACs has grown from 55 to 116.

We are grateful that you appreciate the importance of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self-Determination Act. In May 2008, you stated in an interview with the Eugene Register-Guard, "I completely agree that it's [SRSCA] an obligation we have to meet. I think that we're not meeting it well right now because we're doing it piecemeal year after year by

year. . . .” Those words send a strong message about the need to support this ongoing commitment to rural America.

We look forward to meeting with you and your administration to draft legislation to continue this historic partnership with rural America.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio

Kurt Schrader

Mike Ross

Walt Minnick

Greg Walden

Gregg Harper

Jo Ann Emerson

Cathy McMorris Rogers

Joe Barton

David Wu

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin

Tom McClintock

Don Young

Rick Larsen

Louie Gohmert

Bennie G. Thompson

Ann Kirkpatrick

Heath Shuler

Earl Blumenauer

Ben Ray Lujan

Glenn "GT" Thompson

Harry Teague

Nick Rahall

Brian Baird

Wally Herger

Rob Bishop

Phil Roe

Jim Matheson

Raul Grijalva

Doc Hastings

Marion Berry

Jason Chaffetz

Denny Rehberg

Betsy Markey

Jim McDermott

Adam Smith

Russ Carnahan

Jim Oberstar

Norm Dicks

John Shadegg

Vic Snyder

Mike Simpson

Dan Lungren

Rick Boucher

Gene Taylor

Jay Inslee

Cynthia Lummis

Devin Nunes

David Reichert

Debbie Halvorson

John Salazar

Jared Polis

Allen Boyd

Kevin Brady

John Boozman

Lois Capps

Dan Boren

Parker Griffith

Roy Blunt

Dean Heller

Martin Heinrich

Bart Stupak

Ike Skelton

Bobby Bright

Gabrielle Giffords

Shelley Moore Capito

George Radanovich