

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We strongly urge the inclusion of at least a two-year reauthorization of Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) -- two programs that enjoy tremendous bipartisan support -- in any end-of-the-year legislation.

For over two decades, SRS has been a critical lifeline to over 775 counties in more than 40 states by helping fund over 4,400 schools, road maintenance, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations on federal lands. Historically, the federal government shared with county governments 25 percent of timber sales from federal forestlands and 50 percent of revenues from certain lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Due to declining timber sales and county revenues, Congress first passed SRS in 2000 to provide a measure of compensation for counties containing federal timberland. SRS expired at the end of fiscal year 2018, with the final payments distributed to county governments early in calendar year 2019.

Additionally, because the federal government does not pay local property taxes, rural counties containing large swaths of federal lands cannot collect this critical revenue source and are routinely forced to make difficult financial decisions. Since 1976, nearly 1,900 counties across 49 states have relied on PILT to provide essential county services like law enforcement, jails, mental health programs, and libraries. PILT will expire at the end of fiscal year 2019, with final payments distributed to county governments earlier this year. We appreciate the work of the Appropriations Committee to include full funding for PILT in their fiscal year 2020 Interior and Environment legislation recently reported to the full Senate with unanimous support, and urge its swift consideration before the full Senate.

Congress has an obligation to ensure counties with large swaths of federally-owned, tax-exempt forests and rangelands can adequately provide essential services for their residents. As history has proven, without the certainty of these two critical programs, schools, libraries, and jails will close. The services counties continue to provide will see a reduction in staffing and resources. Roads will go unpaved and become unsafe. Mental health and physical health services will be scaled back and, in some cases, even ended. Fewer and fewer law enforcement officers will be forced to patrol larger and larger areas.

As we work to establish a permanent county payments solution, diversify rural economies, and improve forest management and forest health, a short-term reauthorization of at least two years is critical to provide fiscal certainty for counties containing federally-owned lands.

In the interest of working together in a bipartisan way to support rural communities, we ask that you include at least a two-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Payments in Lieu of Taxes programs in any end-of-the-year funding package. We appreciate your assistance and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,


  
Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress

  
Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Member of Congress


  
Mark Amodei  
Member of Congress

  
Andy Barr  
Member of Congress

  
Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress

  
Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

  
Anthony Brindisi  
Member of Congress

  
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress

  
Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

  
Liz Cheney  
Member of Congress



David Schweikert  
Member of Congress



Mike Simpson  
Member of Congress



Jason Smith  
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



Thomas Suozzi  
Member of Congress



Scott Tipton  
Member of Congress



Dina Titus  
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Glenn Thompson  
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Xochitl Torres Small  
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Jefferson Van Drew  
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Juan Vargas  
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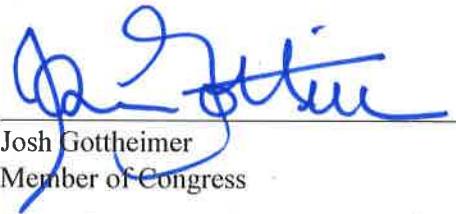
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Steven Horsford  
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Rob Bishop  
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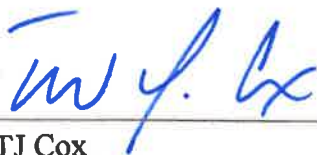


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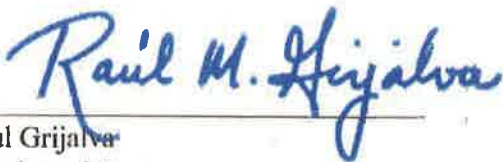
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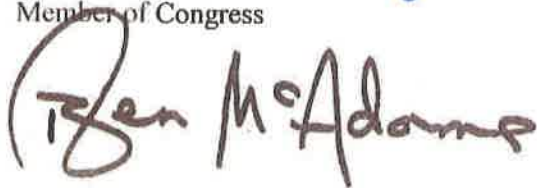
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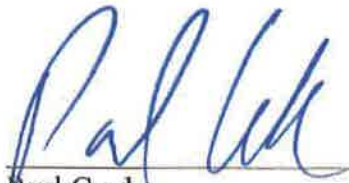
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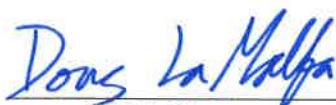
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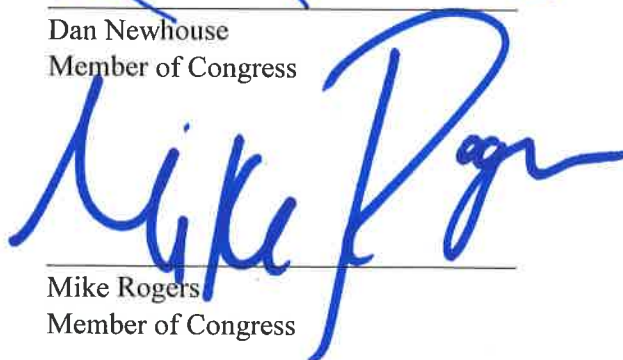
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