

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 11, 2008

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Colleagues:

As you develop the emergency supplemental appropriations bill to fund vital government programs, we implore you to include the language of Senate Amendment 709 to reauthorize and fully fund a four-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-393) ("county payments program") and fully fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes Program ("PILT"). The Senate recognized that the bipartisan proposal would provide a necessary economic safety net to thousands of counties across the country, and it passed the Senate by a 74-23 vote on last year's supplemental appropriations bill. Unfortunately, despite the overwhelming support for the proposal, only one year of funding for the county payments program was enacted in the conferenced version of last year's emergency supplemental bill.

The thousands of counties that rely on these programs currently are facing enormous economic challenges. Many counties have experienced a dramatic downturn in the real estate market, which has a particularly acute impact on local budgets. As a result, it is even more urgent today than it was last year to provide counties with both the immediate support and the ability to plan a long-term recovery strategy that the four-year extension would provide.

The PILT program supports more than 1,900 counties in 49 States across the country, and the county payments program, and funding for it, is critical to the survival of over 775 rural counties and 4,400 schools near national forests in 42 states across the country. A number of counties around the country already have begun sending out hundreds of pink slips notifying employees of impending layoffs if the county payments program is not reauthorized. Without reauthorization of and funding for these programs, the predicament will be an emergency without rescue for hundreds and hundreds of counties across America.

We very much appreciated your support for this proposal last year, and look forward to working with you again this year to finally enact it into law.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senate



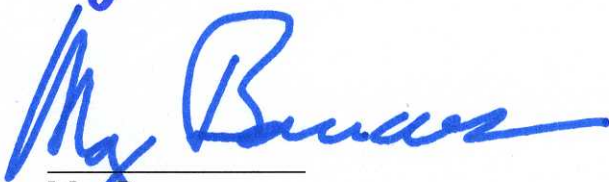
Pete Domenici
United States Senate



Jeff Bingaman
United States Senate



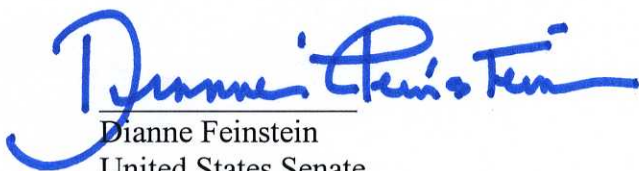
Mike Crapo
United States Senate



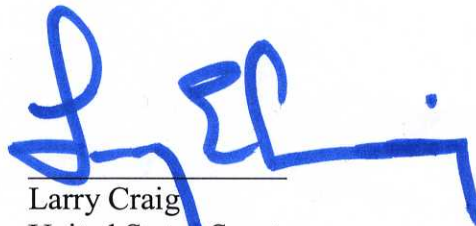
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