United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 10, 2012

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John D. Rockefeller
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
The Honorable Tim Johnson
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
The Honorable Bill Nelson
The Honorable Robert Menendez

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
The Honorable David Vitter
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
The Honorable Orrin Hatch
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
The Honorable John Hoeven

Dear Senate Conferees:

We write to respectfully request that you extend funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act and the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program in the surface transportation reauthorization legislation being considered in conference. There is broad support and urgency for extending funding for these programs, as evidenced by Senate Amendment 1825, passed as part of MAP-21 by a vote of 82 to 16, and the introduction of S. 1692 by 33 Republican and Democratic cosponsors. Extending funding for these programs also is strongly supported by counties, schools, and public land stakeholders from around the country.

The Secure Rural Schools (commonly referred to as the county payments program) and Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) programs provide critical payments to thousands of counties across the nation. Notably, the Secure Rural Schools program expired last year, making its inclusion in this legislation critical. Without this funding, counties' budgets are facing drastic cuts, and potential insolvency; and this legislation provides the last opportunity to pass an extension before layoffs take place and are made permanent for road crews, teachers, and other county workers across rural America.

The Secure Rural Schools program reflects the commitment that the U.S. government made to rural forest counties when it set aside 193 million acres of forest lands for the benefit of the entire nation. The PILT program also provides critical funding to more than 1,900 counties in 49 states and territories, to help make up for diminished property tax revenues because of Federal land ownership. These programs help to fund essential services for the citizens of these rural communities and, in a time of serious economic downturn, create and maintain important family-wage jobs that stand to be lost. A significant portion of the funding received through these programs is spent on roads, including critical highway spending and road maintenance. Without these funds, maintenance on some roads will simply cease and road crews will lose their jobs.

Failure to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools program in 2012 would have a devastating impact on our most rural and most economically depressed counties and school districts across the nation. It is projected that well over 11,000 jobs will be lost in the next year alone if it is not reauthorized. Furthermore, the loss of this critical funding will lead to U.S. businesses, primarily in rural America, losing almost $1.37 billion in revenues, and $188 million in lost tax receipts in

2012-13. Similarly, a reduction in PILT funding will also add to further layoffs in these rural communities, many of which are struggling the most in the economic downturn.

We urge you to extend funding for these critical programs in the transportation reauthorization legislation. Thank you for your attention to and consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

John Boozman
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Mike Crapo
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

James E. Risch
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Dean Heller
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Roy Blunt
United States Senator

Mark L. Pryor
United States Senator

Thad Cochran
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Mike Lee
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator

Mark Udall
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

Carl Levin
United States Senator

Al Franken
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator