



Partnership for Rural America Campaign

An Initiative of: National Forests Counties & Schools Coalition

Statement on Senate introduction of SRSCA reauthorization

We appreciate that the Senate has recognized the importance of reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. Unfortunately, the amount is inadequate and the ramp down over five years is disappointing. However, this bill places the issue in front of Congress. Over the next few weeks, we look forward to a constructive and positive discussion on the importance of the act and the need for adequate funding of the act.

The Secure Rural Schools Act provides critical services to 729 rural counties and funds to educate over 9 million schoolchildren in 4400 school Districts in 42 states. It is important to note that since 2007, Counties and schools have seen payments dramatically reduced. The Senate proposal presented on October 5th starts with the already reduced 2011 funding level and reduces the payments by an additional five percent per year over the next four years. These are rural forested counties where the government owns the majority of the land and where the US Government has demonstrated a 100 year commitment to support essential county road and school infrastructure. As a consequence of this federal land ownership, these counties suffer from the burden of very limited tax bases.

While the proposal is well intentioned it represents a significant reduction in historic infrastructure support. The net effect is that it starves counties of funds for essential services and will slowly but surely further erode education opportunities for rural forested county school children. What this all adds up to is more unemployment in rural communities that are already reeling from today's economic climate.

The reality is that even with reauthorization at a level that does not further weaken rural forested counties we need to seriously take up the discussion of natural resource and other sustainable job creation which should be the long term solution. We again thank the senate for introducing the legislation and will work very hard for a positive result.

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