

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We write to strongly urge the inclusion of at least a two-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, which enjoys tremendous bipartisan support, in any end-of-the-year legislation.

On U.S. Forest Service land, the federal government has historically shared 25 percent of timber harvest revenues with counties to compensate for federal ownership. On certain land managed by the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Land Management shares 50 percent of the revenue from federal timber sales with counties. Due to declining timber harvests, a critical source of funding for rural counties, sometimes referred to as "forest counties," has seen significant decreases, often decimating impacted county budgets.

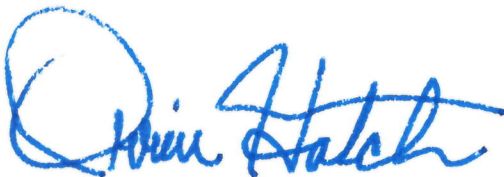
In 2000, Congress passed SRS with broad bipartisan support as a fiscal solution to help fund essential services resulting from the reduced revenue-sharing receipts. Since then, SRS has been a critical lifeline for over 775 counties in over 40 states across the country by helping fund more than 4,400 schools, road maintenance, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations. However, SRS authorization lapsed last year and rural counties are now back to simply receiving the timber revenue-sharing receipts. These receipts are up to 80 percent less than what forest counties received under SRS.

We are now witnessing firsthand the hardships rural counties face as a result of SRS authorization lapsing. Without the certainty of SRS payments, schools, libraries, and jails are closing. Schools that remain open will see a reduction of teachers. Roads go unpaved and become unsafe. Mental and physical health services are scaled back or even ended. Fewer and fewer law enforcement officers are forced to patrol larger and larger areas.

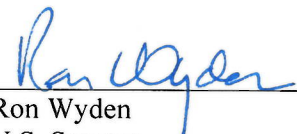
The SRS program continues to be a critical safety-net for forest counties as we work to diversify rural economies, improve forest management and forest health, strengthen historic forest revenue sharing with local governments, and ensure that our forests provide a range of values such as clean water, jobs, and wood fiber for local economies.

In the interest of working together in a bipartisan way to support local rural communities, we ask that you include a reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools in any end-of-the-year legislation. We appreciate your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,



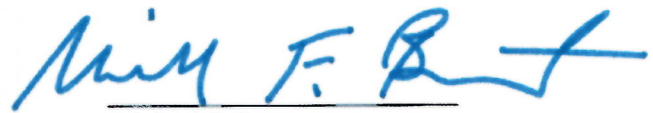
Orrin Hatch
U.S. Senator




Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator




John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
U.S. Senator



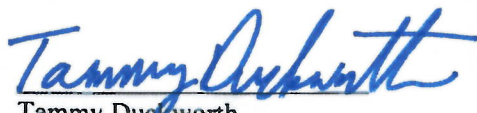
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
U.S. Senator



Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator




Steve Daines
U.S. Senator




Tammy Duckworth
U.S. Senator



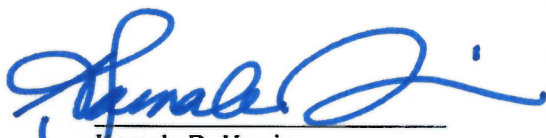
Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator



Al Franken
U.S. Senator



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator



Kamala D. Harris
U.S. Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator



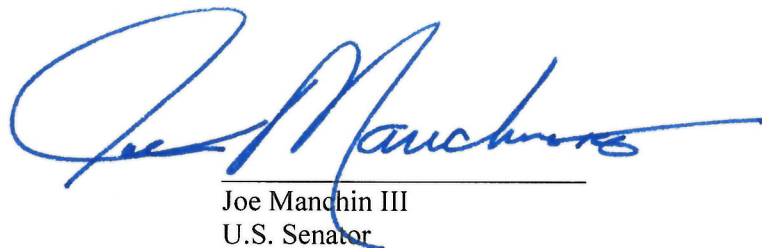
Martin Heinrich
U.S. Senator



Dean Heller
U.S. Senator



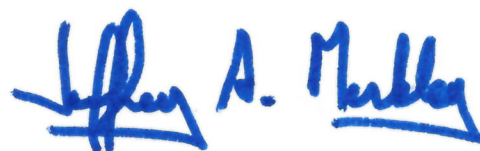
Amy Klobuchar
U.S. Senator



Joe Manchin III
U.S. Senator



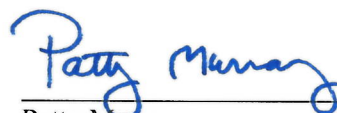
Claire McCaskill
U.S. Senator



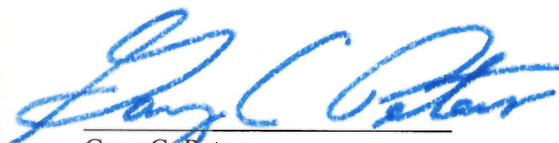
Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator



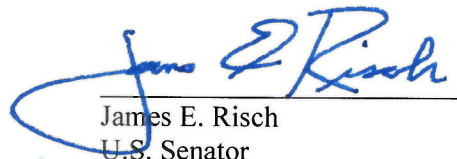
Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator



Gary C. Peters
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



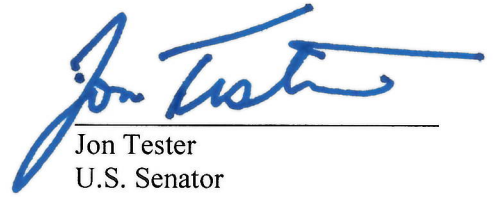
Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator



Dan Sullivan
U.S. Senator



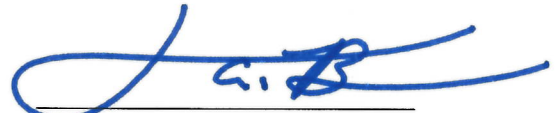
Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



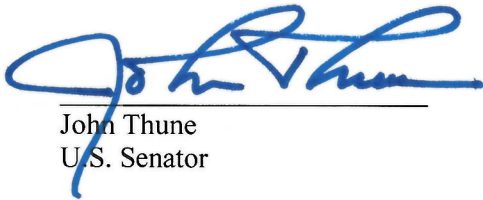
Jon Tester
U.S. Senator



Roger F. Wicker
U.S. Senator



Cory A. Booker
U.S. Senator



John Thune
U.S. Senator