

March 8, 2007

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WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) is pleased to announce today that a one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has been included in the Emergency Supplemental funding bill.

“Today's news comes as a welcome victory in our fight to continue the successful and critical county payments program,” DeFazio said. “For months, my sole focus has been finding a way to ensure these payments continue, to keep rural schools open, roads maintained and law enforcement patrolling.

“Our hard work paid off today, thanks to the Democratic leadership's understanding of the critical need for this program. This is an important first step, and I will continue to fight to keep this funding in the bill. We still have hurdles to overcome before this short-term reauthorization is a reality. Once we get this funding passed, we will begin to work on a longer-term solution, which will need to be initiated on the Senate side.”

Last year, the county payments program provided nearly \$280 million to 33 Oregon counties for services like schools, roads and law enforcement. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally owned lands. Prior to the enactment of the county payments program, they had received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy. In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act to help stabilize these payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.

DeFazio and Rep. Greg Walden have also introduced a bill that would reauthorize the county payments program for an additional seven years, HR 17.

The bill includes \$400 million, which will be paid out for the counties' 2007 fiscal year, which begins in July. The last payments to the counties were made in December for fiscal year 2006.