Montana Office of Public Instruction

Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

March 12, 2007

Senator Jon Tester
B40E Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester,

The Rural Schools and Community Act (RSCA) of 2000 passed with wide bi-partisan support in both the Senate and the House. The RSCA preserved over $14 million in revenue to continue servicing Montana schools and counties in heavily forested areas, and more than $400 million nationally. Now those critical resources are in jeopardy.

The resources are sizable in counties where the taxable land base decreased with the designation of large tracts of land as national forest. For counties and schools in the Western half of Montana, the payments make up a large portion of their total budgets. Without these funds, communities are considering a wide range of undesirable options including local gas taxes and local-option sales taxes.

We are deeply appreciative of the efforts made by your colleague, Senator Baucus, to preserve funding and to do it in a responsible way. In particular, we were appreciative of his opposition to the Department of Agriculture's proposal to sell large tracts of national forest lands which would have done even more long term harm to Montana schools and counties. We hope that the Montana delegation can speak with a unified voice on this question, and every indication we receive from your office, and from Representative Rehberg's office, suggests we can.

Congress has the opportunity to do right by states and counties that faithfully preserve and steward national treasures for the enjoyment of all Americans. We strongly urge that Congress, in the opening days of the 110th session, truly demonstrate a new course by passing an immediate supplemental appropriation in the amount of $410 million to hold schools and counties harmless in the next federal fiscal year. We urge you to push for a sustainable solution respecting the hardship of lost tax revenues in forest counties and schools.

Thank you in advance for your efforts on behalf of Montana and its schoolchildren.

Sincerely,

Governor Brian Schweitzer

Superintendent Linda McCulloch

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