



Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Wyden

March 19, 2013

- The Committee will come to order.
- Today the Committee is going to look at options for reauthorizing and reforming the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act and the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program.
- **Both of these programs are absolutely critical to rural America and today we will have a number of knowledgeable witnesses who will talk about the funding these programs, as well as possible reforms that could be considered in extending and updating them.**
- In the 1980s, years of unsustainable timber harvests collided with renewed public concern over clean air and water and endangered species. This collision left our country with a broken system that produced the worst of two worlds: an inadequate timber harvest and inadequate protection for public lands. Our timber communities lost jobs, while conservation was more often handled by lawyers and judges rather than foresters and biologists.
- That's why in 2000, along with our former colleague Larry Craig, I authored the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act to provide a lifeline for timber-dependent communities across the nation.
- PILT - Payments in Lieu of Taxes – has long existed to help provide more stable funding to counties containing federal land, but it has suffered a number of funding shortages over the years.

- The funding for Secure Rural Schools expired last year, and full funding for the PILT program ends this year. We now have across the country cash-strapped rural communities facing deadlines later this spring to decide about retaining teachers, whether or not to close schools, what to do about law enforcement and roads and other basic services.
- **So it is especially important that Congress act quickly.**
- **I am especially pleased that our colleague Senator Max, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee on which I'm honored to serve, is joining us here this morning. Chairman Baucus, colleagues, has been there again and again and again for the Secure Rural Schools program and PILT at least one more year.**
- **Looking back at the odyssey of the Secure Rural Schools program, it would have been hard to keep this program afloat without the good work that Chairman Baucus was doing. Thank you very much for all the past help and the assistance that you have pledged going forward.**
- I also want to make clear at this time that a **short-term extension of the Secure Rural Schools Program is not a long-term solution** for our hard-hit resource-dependent communities.
- Our job now is to look for a long-term solution as well. That means focusing on two areas.
- **First, it is way past time to get our people back to work in the woods and increase timber harvest off federal lands. More good-paying, private-sector jobs are needed in resource-dependent communities with federal lands and federal waters. This is something I believe can be done consistent with our environmental laws.**
- **That's why I am working with Senator Murkowski, Senator Landrieu and others on a more comprehensive approach to sharing revenues from federal lands and waters with resource-dependent communities.**
- **In effect what we are talking about is pursuing this on a dual track: boosting timber cuts and providing a safety net that provides for schools, roads and police in resource-dependent communities and then our bipartisan coalition will also support reauthorizing the SRS payment**

program while looking for a long-term solution that understands we have to increase our timber harvest, look for jobs in communities that abut federal lands and federal waters and protect our environmental heritage.

- With respect to federal forests, that would mean that in some areas we would increase timber harvests and in other areas we would permanently conserve our special treasures.
- The members of this committee have over the past 15 years made it a priority to build bipartisan coalitions to break bureaucratic logjams in public lands management. That's what happened with Secure Rural Schools, that's what happened with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, that's what we've seen in Eastern Oregon where the environmentalists and timber industry came together.
- I do want to state that while we are going to look at further hearings to focus on forest management, **experts tell us it is not possible to cut enough trees to produce historic levels of funding in rural counties and comply with the multiple uses of our federal forests that our communities want and meet our bedrock environmental laws.**
- **The challenge is to find a way to pursue on this dual track a short term and a long-term solution, while looking for some fresh approaches and rejecting those approaches that have not worked in the past. Short cuts like selling off federal lands or ignoring environmental laws cannot be expected to pass the Senate or be signed by the President.** These ideas have failed for more than 20 years. To create a realistic solution for increased forest management, any solution is going to require a kind of broad coalition with buy-in from all sides that has been shown to work in the past.
- **I believe that as we look to cut more timber on federal forest lands, we can do it in a way that creates jobs, saves mills and makes our forests healthier and more resistant to wildfire, insects and disease.**
- **The committee is going to work in a bipartisan way to achieve this goal of upping the timber harvest while protecting old growth stands, clean water and essential habitats and we believe we can do it in a bipartisan way by streamlining the bureaucracy around forest management,**

promoting tourism and recreation, and increasing biomass energy development.

- Rural counties with federal lands and waters deserve to be able to staff the schools, fund law enforcement and maintain the roads required by the use or preservation of those lands. My policy to end the perpetual roller coaster from revenue sharing includes new initiatives to create private sector jobs, protect the environment, and most of all make sure rural America does not become a ghost town. It's time for a broader revenue sharing effort that can provide affected states and communities with a share of the money generated from resource extraction from nearby federal lands and federal waters.

Senator Murkowski, our ranking member, has a great interest in this manner, as does Senator Landrieu. Let me recognize Senator Murkowski.