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31 Bipartisan Members Send Letter Questioning Obama Admin's Retroactive Sequestration Cuts to SRS Payments used for Rural Schools and Emergency Services

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) and a bipartisan group of 30 Members of Congress sent a [letter](#) today to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Office of Management and Budget Director Jeffrey Zients questioning why the Obama Administration is retroactively subjecting Secure Rural School (SRS) payments, which were made to counties in January based on fiscal year 2012 revenues, to the fiscal year 2013 sequester.

Due to the continued inability of the federal government to manage National Forest lands and provide local communities with a meaningful share of revenues from timber receipts, Congress has approved SRS payments to provide rural counties with funds for teachers, schools, police officers, emergency services and infrastructure. The SRS program was most recently extended through fiscal year 2012 as part of the "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act," that was signed into law by President Obama on July 6, 2012. The Department of Agriculture distributed \$323 million to 41 states in accordance with that law in January of this year. The Obama Administration is now requesting repayment of \$17.9 million in SRS and 25% fund payments that have already been disbursed to States.

In the letter, the Members request that the repayment be halted and ask for a detailed explanation of the legal authority for demanding repayment of fiscal year 12 funds that have already been paid out by the federal government.

"Though the Forest Service was aware of the pending automatic spending reductions for many months, and the sequester took effect on March 1st, the agency made no mention of an impact on SRS payments until March 20th. For the Administration to announce three months after the disbursement of these payments that they are subject to the sequester, and that States will receive a bill for repayment of funds already distributed to counties, appears to be an obvious attempt by President Obama's Administration to make the sequester as painful as possible," wrote the Members in the letter.

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