Senate approves one-year extension of Secure Rural Schools funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program in 2012, many counties and schools who depend on the annual forest payments are gravely concerned about the potential loss of federal funding which enables counties to provide vitally important public services such as health care, search and rescue operations and maintenance of roads and bridges. Today, the U.S. Senate passed the Helium Stewardship Act (H.R. 527), which included a provision which extends SRS funding for an additional year.

The House of Representatives passed an earlier version of the helium reauthorization (without SRS funding) with 365 votes on April 26, 2013. The amended bill heads now to the House where it must be acted upon by Oct. 1 to avoid a shutdown of the Helium Reserve.

“While the Senate and House may differ in their legislative solutions for future forest payments to counties, the National Association of Counties (NACo) will continue to urge leadership on both sides of the aisle to act in a spirit of bipartisan and bicameral cooperation and work together to move a final legislative solution to the president’s desk,” said Matt Chase, NACo executive director.

The expiration of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act will create dramatic budgetary shortfalls for 729 rural counties if Congress fails to renew this federal obligation to rural county governments.

SRS funding replaces lost revenues to counties and schools because of dramatically reduced timber harvests on federal lands.

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,069 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.