

WESTERN CAUCUS LEADERS APPLAUD PASSAGE OF BIPARTISAN AMENDMENT TO INCREASE PILT FUNDING

Washington D.C. - The U.S. House of Representatives yesterday approved a historic level of \$244 million to fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program in 2007. Through PILT, the Interior Department makes payments to counties to make up for property taxes counties cannot collect on federal lands located within their boundaries.

The passage of the bipartisan Cannon/Udall/Rahall/Salazar/Gibbons/Bishop amendment provides approximately 70 percent of this year's authorized level for PILT by redirecting funds from Interior Department overhead, which has nearly doubled in six years. While this represents an increase of \$14 million over 2006 funding levels, it actually represents a decrease in the percentage of the authorized level when adjusted for inflation.

The increase in funds will help counties across the country cover increasing responsibilities for essential services such as environmental compliance, law enforcement, health care, education, firefighting and search and rescue. For nearly 30 years, the PILT program has provided funding to more than 1,900 counties in 49 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"It is imperative that we keep fighting for funding so that rural counties won't have to continue to foot the bill for lands owned by the federal government. This adds a modest sum to the PILT program, a sum that is important to the American people who live in these public lands communities and those who enjoy them from the rest of the country," Cannon said.

"I've said it before and I will say it again - the feds have become an absentee slumlord in the West. How are we supposed to generate a tax base when 2/3 of our state is locked away and off the property tax rolls? PILT is simply a small effort to right this huge wrong. The Administration's initial proposed funding level, which was way too low, was a slap in the face of the West. I'm glad we've been able to join with our Western colleagues and increase funding for this program which is so critical to our counties in Utah. It's still not enough, but we are moving in the right direction," Bishop said.

"It is unacceptable that Nevada and many other states continue to be short-changed by the federal government under the PILT program; however, this amendment is a positive addition to the FY07 funding levels," said Gibbons. "PILT has never been funded at a level that would adequately compensate Nevada's communities for revenue shortfalls created by overwhelming federal land ownership. Inadequate PILT funding creates shortfalls that affect our counties' ability to provide necessary services such as law enforcement, emergency healthcare, education, and many other infrastructure needs. While this amendment is a step in the right direction, PILT funding continues to fail to meet the needs of many of our rural communities."

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