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Jason Smith's Capitol Report - April 3, 2015

APRIL 03RD 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Rural Schools Deserve a Fair Shake **Friday, April 3, 2015**

8th Congressional District, Missouri - This week, I met with school superintendents and county commissioners in south-central Missouri to give an update on the Secure Rural Schools funding program. Twenty-one of the 30 counties in our congressional district receive this federal funding which benefits many rural schools in our area, but authorization for this program expired at the end of Fiscal Year 2013. Without continuation of the Secure Rural Schools program, schools and counties face a 75 percent reduction in funding, amounting to nearly \$2.5 million lost state-wide. Fortunately, at the end of March the House of Representatives passed reauthorization of this program through the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

The Secure Rural Schools program is critical to making Washington work for rural America instead of against it. Traditionally, when a tree was harvested on federal lands, schools in the same county received a portion of the timber sales. Since federal lands are tax-exempt, this helped compensate rural counties for the tax revenue the land would have brought in if it was privately owned. Unfortunately, harvesting on federal lands has become more difficult because of restrictive regulations, and that means less timber is being sold. Timber sales are down by more than 90 percent in some areas. To make up the shortfall, the government has funded rural schools and counties directly through the Secure Rural Schools program.

I have been pushing for reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools program since I was first elected to Congress, and I am hopeful that after passing the House last month, the bill will be passed quickly in the Senate and sent over to the president for his signature. Once the president signs the bill, these areas can expect the payment of their remaining 75 percent of the funding within 45 days.

In addition to getting the Secure Rural Schools program reauthorized, I am pressing for an increase in the timber harvest on the Mark Twain National Forest and other federal lands. This combination will stimulate our economy, provide valuable new jobs in the timber industry, and provide more funding to school districts.

The simple truth is that rural America deserves better. Our schools aren't looking for a handout; they are looking for a hand up. Let's get government regulators out of the way to grow timber sales, economic opportunity, an

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