

WESTERN CAUCUS NEWS

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Western Caucus Applauds Chairman Taylor's Efforts to Decrease Federal Land Acquisition

Washington, D.C. – Members of the Congressional Western Caucus reacted positively to news from the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee that federal land acquisition funds would be reduced in the FY 2006 Interior Appropriations bill to \$43 million – a reduction of \$212 million.

For the fifth year in a row, the subcommittee has proposed decreasing funds allocated for federal land acquisition while increasing funding for the Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) program. The subcommittee also calls for a \$30 million increase for PILT from the President's FY 2006 proposed budget. The decrease in land acquisitions closely mirrors the request made in a letter to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies earlier in the week by the Western Caucus.

Rep. Chris Cannon (UT-03), Chairman of the Western Caucus, said, "While many of the facilities in our national parks and on public lands have millions of dollars in maintenance backlogs, we've continued to add land to the national portfolio. This is ludicrous. Before we continue to purchase additional land, I want to make sure all 1,900 counties throughout the nation adequately receive PILT funding for the federal land already in their jurisdiction. I commend Chairman Taylor for opposing additional funding for federal land acquisition."

Rep. Jeff Flake (AZ-06), Vice Chairman of the Western Caucus, said “I praise Chairman Taylor for the second year in a row for his recognizing the need to stop the federal government from expanding, literally, across the West through land acquisition.”

“The federal government has a hard time taking care of the land it already owns. The last thing the people of the west need is even more federal influence in land management decisions. I hope this reduction of land acquisition funds will allow the federal government to focus on better stewardship of its current land holdings instead of becoming a landlord to thousands more acres of the American West,” said Rep. Barbara Cubin (WY-At Large)

“The Federal Government owns too much land, not too little. Throwing more money at acquiring even more lands doesn't make sense when Congress struggles to deal with and properly fund what we already have. I commend Chairman Taylor for coming up with an appropriations plan that reflects this reality. His common sense approach to increasing funding for PILT and decreasing funding for land acquisition is the right thing to do,” said Rep. Rob Bishop (UT-01).

Rep. C.L. “Butch” Otter (ID-01) said, "Almost two-thirds of Idaho already is federally owned, and therefore exempt from local property taxes that pay for everything from our children's schools to police and fire protection. Picking up the slack means we each pay higher property taxes and our counties are forced to make tough choices about essential public services. Counties in Idaho were shorted \$75.5 million on the PILT program from 1995 through 2004 alone. While this doesn't fix the problem, it might at least keep it from getting any worse."

“I am grateful to Chairman Taylor for increasing PILT above the initial budget request. PILT has never been fully funded. New Mexico’s Second Congressional District, which I represent, has, according to the Department of Interior, lost \$77 million in PILT funds since 1995. These funds are extremely important, often critical, to local communities which depend on PILT payments to support schools, build roads, clean up local water supplies and pay for other vital local services within our communities. Large amounts of federal ownership create a huge strain on the New Mexico economy because we do not have the same opportunity to earn tax revenues as other states. We should be increasing PILT, not moving in the other direction,” said Rep. Steve Pearce (NM-02).

The Western Caucus is a group of 60 members of Congress committed to protecting the interests and ideals of the West.

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