



Board of County Commissioners

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OpEd: Congress must act now on SRS funding lifeline

By Lewis County Commissioners Scott Brummer, Lindsey Pollock and Sean Swope

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Rural counties like ours don't ask for special treatment. We just ask for fairness – and for the tools to do the job of serving our communities. That's why the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program is so important to Lewis County, and why Congress must act swiftly to reauthorize and fully fund it.

Lewis County is home to more than 1,200 miles of county roadways – roads that school buses, ambulances, firefighters, farmers, commuters and families use every single day. Maintaining that vast network in a large, rural county is no small task. SRS funding allows us to pave, patch and chip seal to keep these roads safe and usable. Every \$1 million in SRS dollars allows our Public Works Department to maintain approximately 30 miles of roadway. That's real value for taxpayers – and vital infrastructure for our communities.

But here's the problem: SRS funding has been slashed over the years, dropping from \$2.2 million in 2006 to less than \$700,000 in 2023. The result? Fewer miles maintained. More delayed repairs. Projects canceled or postponed indefinitely. Routine maintenance turns into costly emergency work. We fall behind – and our residents pay the price in vehicle damage, safety risks and limited access.

SRS was created to replace timber revenue lost to federal land management changes. For decades, counties like ours received a share of federal timber sales to fund schools, roads and basic services. As logging on federal lands declined, Congress recognized the need to stabilize county funding – and SRS was born.

That promise, however, has become uncertain. Reauthorizations have been short-term and unpredictable, making it difficult for local governments to plan responsibly. And now, with the program expired again after FY 2023, communities across rural America are once more left hanging.

This isn't just a Lewis County problem. More than 700 counties and 4,000 school districts across the nation rely on SRS funding. Here in Washington, and especially in timber-rich

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counties like ours, the impact is especially acute. Without a long-term solution, the roads deteriorate, classrooms shrink and essential public services falter.

Congress has the chance to fix this. The Secure Rural Schools Act of 2025 (H.R. 1383 and its Senate companion bill) would extend funding through FY 2026. But stopgap measures are not enough. What rural America needs is stability – a long-term commitment that recognizes our unique relationship with federally managed lands and the vital services we provide on the ground.

We urge Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise and their colleagues in both congressional chambers to support swift passage of the SRS Act as we seek a permanent, sustainable funding solution.

Our roads, our schools and our communities can't afford to wait.

Scott J. Brummer; Lindsey R. Pollock, DVM; and Sean D. Swope serve as the elected Board of County Commissioners for Lewis County, Washington.

