

Chairman Grijalva Ranking member Bishop and members of the committee, good morning. Allan Thayer at your service. I'm an elected School Board member, business owner, coach, and father of a sophomore daughter. My son graduated from University of Colorado Boulder last year pre-med.

I live in Montezuma County in southwest Colorado. It's an arid region half high desert and half mountains. It is home to Mesa Verde National Park, Canyon of the Ancients, and Four Corners National Monument. There are 2,084 square miles in the county, an area a little larger than Delaware. Six hundred seventy six square miles are Ute Mountain Ute tribe reservation. Three hundred eighty seven square miles are National Forest. Two hundred eight square miles are B.L.M. The county is roughly 70% federal land and 30% private land. There are approximately 27,000 people here and 3 school districts. My school district, Dolores RE-4A, has 710 students.

Last year, the Dolores RE-4A School District received \$37,598.00 in Secure Rural School Funds. We used this money for another elementary teacher. This allowed us to keep our class size small, 18-22 students. Our Elementary focus is on reading and math, and with this money we are continually bringing up these test scores. Even with our school population at 55% below poverty level, we are a high achieving district within our state.

Mancos School District, the smallest, with about 400 students received \$20,271.00. Their superintendent said, "In these hard economic times the Secure Rural School Funds have allowed us not to have to cut a teaching position".

Cortez RE-1 School District, our largest, with an enrollment of approximately 2,900 students received \$155,514.00 (in 08-09 they received \$181,523.00). The Cortez Chief Financial Officer wrote: "Our average teacher cost is \$37,400.00 salary, \$10,700.00 in benefits for a total of \$48,100.00. Our 2009-2010 payment paid for a little over 3 teachers. This money has been essential with our declining enrollment, need to change, and the economic climate that has reduced our state funding".

Two years ago the acting Superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park, William Nelligan and his family moved to Dolores from New Jersey. He has 3 school age children. He and his wife were worried about coming to a small rural area, as their children attended a private school in New Jersey. They checked out Dolores and couldn't believe the quality of our staff, administration, and curriculum. Mr. Nelligan said "My 5th grade son was welcomed personally by the Principal. Then he was assessed by the counselor and his teacher, and then they challenged him to the high end of his learning level, he was allowed to slide nowhere. My freshman daughter was excited that you had an F.F.A. program, and it is quality from top to bottom. Your graduation rate, and college placement of seniors is unheard of."

Dolores Re-4A School District graduate on average 95% of our incoming freshman. In May's graduation, we sent over 40 out of 54 seniors to higher education

We are an economically depressed area - Dolores RE-4A ranks in the bottom 15% in our state. We need and are very appreciative of these Secure Rural school dollars to maintain our high standards. Colorado limits school district revenue to property taxes and a state equalization formula that even the Colorado Department of Education doesn't understand. Every dollar outside of property taxes is very important. One hundred sixty three people in Dolores work for taxing districts (the school or the federal government). The other half work for the tax-paying employers, the largest of which is Aspen Wall Wood, a lumber yard, with 16 employees.

As stated earlier, 70% of Montezuma County does not pay property taxes. Our income is farming, tourism, and very little mining. Our small businesses, grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants, hotels, these places generate our tax dollars.

Secure Rural Schools Funding shows the U.S. government understands the 41 states and Puerto Rico that receive these dollars need them to maintain their level of excellence in education that America demands! Montezuma County Commissioners have partnered with their school districts and give them the maximum amount of this money at their disposal. I believe America's future quality of life depends on the education we give our kids today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and please protect this funding source for our schools.

Allan Thayer