



## Senator Jason A. Atkinson

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### Atkinson fights for rural county payments

**Salem, OR** – Oregon’s rural counties are in dire financial trouble without federal timber payments and Senator Jason Atkinson (R-Central Point) is fighting to keep them afloat. Senator Atkinson voted to pass House Joint Memorial 25 on the floor today, which urges President Obama and the United States Congress to renew the *Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000*.

“Our rural counties are facing financial crisis,” Atkinson said in his floor speech. “It is a crisis when our sheriffs cannot protect the people they were elected to protect because of a lack of money. They have to choose between letting meth dealers out of jail or sending officers into harm’s way without backup.”

Oregon counties are in a bind due to federal policy regarding federal forest lands. Most of Oregon’s land is owned by the federal government – 53% of all Oregon land and 60% of forest land according to Atkinson – and counties lose out on the potential tax revenues from those lands.

“Counties are facing bankruptcy without these payments,” said Atkinson. “Oregon would face a serious dilemma if these counties go bankrupt. Who would absorb the services these counties provide? Who would handle emergency services such as police, ambulance, and fire? Who handles the jails and land-use issues?”

The biggest problem, according to Atkinson, is the creation of national monuments throughout Oregon by the federal Department of the Interior; he called the proposed Klamath Siskiyou monument indicative of the larger problem. A problem exacerbated by Secretarial Order No. 3310 issued by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in December of last year. It would allow the DOI to unilaterally establish national monuments without congressional approval or local input.

“It is wrong for the federal government to close off public lands without input from the local communities,” said Atkinson. “This monument would take over 600,000 acres of public land away from our control. Everyone in Southern Oregon and Northern California agrees; we do not want this.”

Atkinson also mentioned the mismanagement of federal forest lands, citing the Biscuit Fire in 2002. Over 500,000 acres burned due largely to what Atkinson described as poor forest management practices by the federal government. After the fire was put out, Oregonians were prevented from harvesting the timber left behind. He said Oregon would be able to take better care of the forest land, along with providing Oregonians timber jobs.

“A no vote tells the federal government, ‘go ahead and set up more monuments,’” Atkinson said of HJM 25 on the floor. “A yes vote tells the federal government to keep its word.”