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## **U.S. House of Representatives**

### **Committee on Resources**

**Washington, DC 20515**

**March 25, 2003**

NICK J. RAHALL II, WV

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**Honorable Don Young, Chairman**  
**Honorable James L. Oberstar, Ranking Member**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

**Dear Chairman Young and Ranking Member Oberstar:**

**We are writing to support your efforts to reinvent the Indian Reservation Road (IRR) Program to meet modern tribal needs as part of the reauthorization of TEA 21.**

**The Indian Reservation Road system serves 562 recognized Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives and consists of approximately 50,000 miles of roads and 745 bridges. About half of the roads are owned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or tribes, and the other half are state, county and local government roads which provide access to and within reservations.**

**The fact of the matter is that today, the existing Indian Reservation Road Program is woefully inadequate. According to the Department of Transportation, Indian reservation roads make up almost three percent of all existing roads on the federal-aid highway system. Yet, these roads have historically received less than one percent of transportation funding initiatives. Currently, only 25% of the roads under BIA and tribal ownership are paved. Meanwhile, tribal governments have documented needs which merit a doubling of Highway Trust Fund monies for the program and the BIA estimates that a three-fold increase is needed to adequately maintain the roads it owns with the tribes.**

**In this regard, as part of the reauthorization of TEA 21 we would appreciate your consideration of the following initiatives which have been developed by NCAI's TEA 21 Reauthorization Task Force:**

- **The establishment of a Tribal Transportation Program initially authorized at \$500 million with annual increases over the authorization period.**

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- Incorporation of a percentage of tribal road maintenance costs under the Highway Trust Fund. The federal investment in tribal roads is being eroded by the lack of adequate maintenance dollars.
- The establishment of a separate Tribal Transportation Bridge category funded at \$50 million annually. Currently, these bridges are funded as an earmark of the overall IRR program amount and prior to TEA 21 were addressed as a 1% set aside of Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation program funds.
- A restoration of the obligation limitation exemption for the Tribal Transportation Program. The extension by TEA 21 of the obligation limitation to the IRR program has resulted in a loss of about \$35 million annually to the tribes.
- The clarification of the applicability of P.L. 93-638 to the Tribal Transportation Program to bolster government-to-government relationships between the tribes and the Federal Highway Administration, as well as promoting and strengthening tribes' self determination.
- Increase tribal opportunities in the area of planning funding, transit, safety and scenic byways.
- Make enhancements to existing regulatory schemes to improve coordination and address impasse issues which arose under the TEA 21 negotiated rulemaking provision.

Your consideration of these issues would be deeply appreciated. We stand ready to assist you in this endeavor in any way possible.

Sincerely,



NICK J. RAHALL, II



EARL BLUMENAUER



BRAD CARSON



DALE E. KILDEE

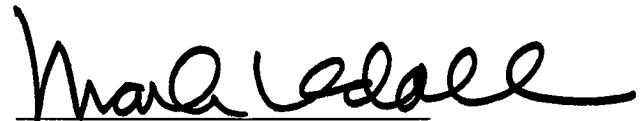
  
GEORGE MILLER

  
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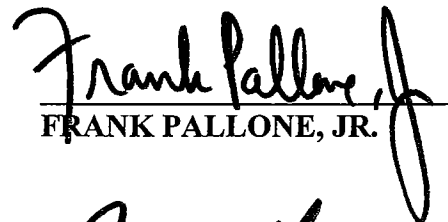
  
RICK LARSEN

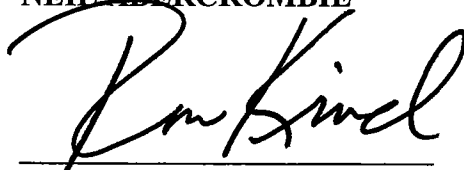
  
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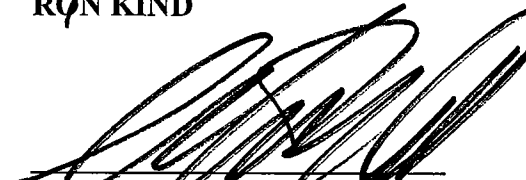
  
MARK UDALL

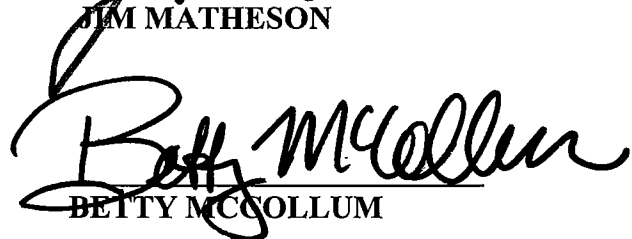
  
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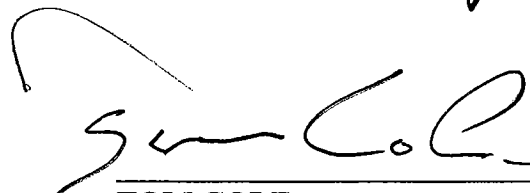
  
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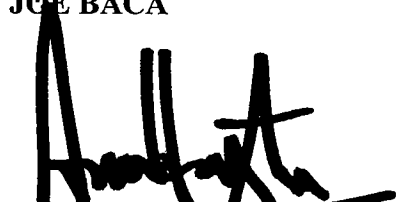
  
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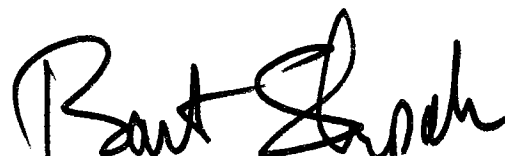
  
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