

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Republican Leader McConnell:

With the fate of the farm bill still uncertain, we urge that any farm bill extension brought to the floor ensure the full and immediate elimination of direct payments.

As you know, direct payments were originally authorized in 1996 as a temporary subsidy to ease the transition of farmers away from Depression-era price supports to a more free-market oriented system. However, extensions in 2002, 2008, and 2012 have left the taxpayers to fund direct payments far longer than Congress originally intended. In total, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates it has paid out more than \$92 billion in direct payments during the program's 17 year existence.

Beyond their unsustainable cost, direct payments are also synonymous with waste, fraud, and abuse. As the *Washington Post* put it, recent analyses of the direct payments program have found that it subsidizes people who aren't really farming: the idle, the urban, and occasionally the dead. These investigations have uncovered taxpayer backed direct payments being paid to billionaires, to New York City condo dwellers, and to non-farming homeowners who happen to live on former farmlands.

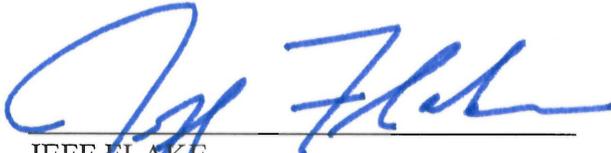
Direct payments have also been the target of a series of scathing reports published by the Government Accountability Office; the most recent of which went so far as to question the purpose and need for direct payments, stating that they did not "align with principles significant to integrity, effectiveness, and efficiency in farm bill programs." That report went on to recommend that Congress consider eliminating direct payments outright.

To its credit, the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry has maintained a clear and sustained effort to eliminate direct payments. In fact, between the 2012 and 2013 Senate farm bills and the majority's sequester replacement legislation, 75 current members of the Senate have voted for the full and immediate elimination of direct payments.

Without regard to whether we supported the Senate farm bill or opposed it, we all agree that Congress should not consider another extension of the 2008 farm bill that continues direct payments. Such an outcome would represent a costly regression in light of the U.S. Senate's bipartisan efforts to eliminate this multibillion dollar subsidy.

Recognizing those important gains, we support leaving direct payments to expire as scheduled. To that end, we again urge that any farm bill extension brought to the floor ensure the full and immediate elimination of direct payments.

Sincerely,



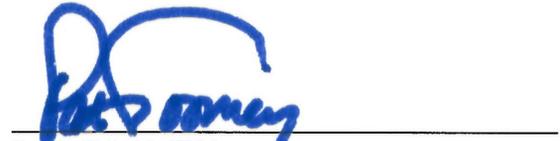
JEFF FLAKE
U.S. Senator



CLAIRE MCCASKILL
U.S. Senator



MARK BEGICH
U.S. Senator



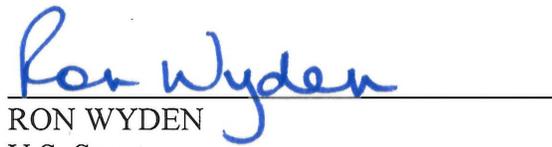
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U.S. Senator



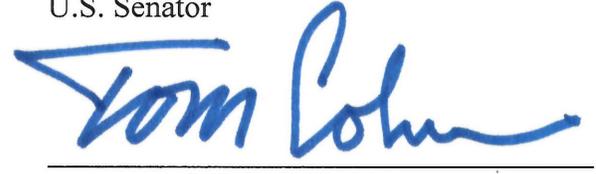
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U.S. Senator



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U.S. Senator



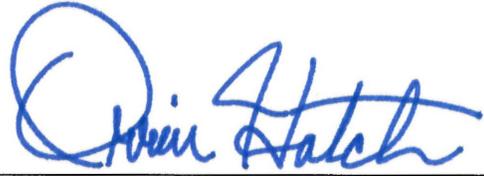
RON JOHNSON
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JOE MANCHIN III
U.S. Senator



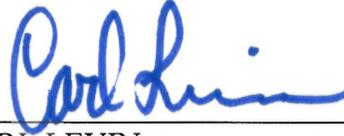
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U.S. Senator



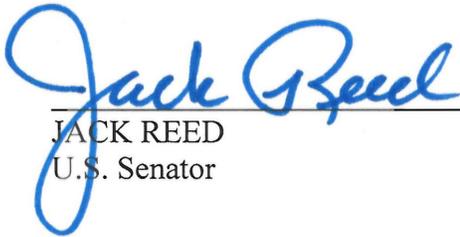
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JACK REED
U.S. Senator



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