

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2802

April 28, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

Recently I was informed by county officials in Nevada that the Department of the Interior has contacted them seeking to recover funds distributed by the federal government for geothermal royalty payments. I strongly oppose this decision and request your immediate action to cease the recovery of these payments. This issue is pending before Congress and collecting these payments will cause hardship for Nevada counties.

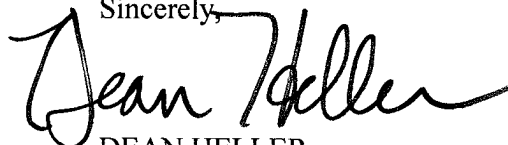
As you know, under the Energy Policy Act of 2005, a revenue sharing provision was implemented that provided a 25% share of royalties from geothermal energy development with counties. Since the enactment of this provision, the payments have been an important part of county budgets.

In the first quarter of fiscal year 2010, funds were disbursed to counties and subsequently allocated by them. Congress did not pass the fiscal year 2010 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act that eliminated the royalty sharing provision until after the beginning of the first quarter of the 2010 fiscal year. As a result, our counties, which are already struggling financially, are now compelled by your department to return monies that have already been allocated and, in some cases, spent. As you can imagine, reclaiming these payments will be a hardship for all counties and devastating to others. I think you will agree with me that Congress' inability to pass an appropriations bill on time should not become a problem for local county governments.

This Administration consistently talks about the economic benefits of promoting renewable energy, including geothermal energy, as part of a solution to our nation's energy issues. The Administration's action is damaging and contradictory to the goal of promoting economic benefits as part of renewable energy development. I respectfully request that the Department of the Interior hold off on removing funds from county budgets until Congress has time to correct this problem.

Additionally, I would like to schedule a meeting with you to discuss the Department's actions and how we can ensure that, in the future, actions by the Department of the Interior do not negatively impact local communities. I would greatly appreciate your assistance with this and look forward to discussing it with you in the near future.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER
Member of Congress