Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell Takes Position Against Fee Demo

Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) recently took a position against access fees for visitors to National Forests, becoming the first member of Colorado’s congressional delegation to come out in opposition to the controversial Fee Demo program. Campbell joins the growing number in Congress opposing Fee Demo nationwide.

The Montrose Daily Press reported that at a recent Town Hall Meeting in Delta, Colorado, Campbell responded to a question from constituent Jerome Janisse by stating that although he supports charging fees to those who take something, such as timber, from the forest, he opposes access fees for recreational visitors. Such fees have become increasingly common nationwide under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (“Fee Demo”).

The Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, which has spearheaded anti-Fee Demo efforts in western Colorado, expressed satisfaction with Campbell’s stance. According to Coalition President Robert Funkhouser, “Senator Campbell’s door has always been open to us as concerned citizens who care about public lands. The Senator and his aides have spent considerable time familiarizing themselves with the Fee Demo issue, and we applaud him for supporting the tradition of free access for enjoyment of our National Forests and BLM lands.”

Grassroots opponents to Fee Demo have become increasingly vocal in the past year. Numerous elected bodies have passed resolutions opposing the test program, including eight county commissions in Colorado, and protest demonstrations in the Ouray area have received national attention. On the Front Range, opponents are challenging the Fee Demo area at Mt Evans.

Originally a two-year test program, Fee Demo has been extended three times and is currently due to end in 2004 unless renewed by Congress.