

Bill would expand drug enforcement in rural regions

Legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate recently would provide \$5 million in funding to enhance federal drug enforcement efforts in rural areas with population densities of less than 40 people per square mile.

The bill, which would cover Alaska and 14 other states, is sponsored by Sens. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, Alan Simpson, R-Wyoming, and Max Baucus, D-Montana.

"This bill would expand the range of criminal investigations into the distribution and manufacturing of illegal drugs, which has spread far beyond the borders of our cities," Stevens said.

"Even some of the most remote rural areas of our nation and our state have been affected by the escalating problems of illegal drug manufacture and distribution," he said.

Current law does not take into account the fact that federal law enforcement agents in rural areas must cover more ground than their counterparts in cities, he said.

Funding, under existing law, allocates \$500,000 to each state, with the balance distributed according to each state's population.

States with smaller populations and larger rural areas are at a disadvantage under current law, Stevens said.

The measure would also authorize \$4.5 million to create 30 new positions for agents within the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, which would include two new agents for Alaska.