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United States Senate

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

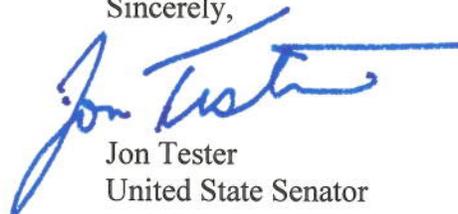
I write to recommend Elouise Cobell as a posthumous candidate for the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Throughout her life, Elouise Cobell brought about real change in Indian Country and her story continues to serve as an inspiration and reminder to everyone that one person can truly make a difference in their community.

Elouise is best known for her role leading the landmark lawsuit *Cobell v. Salazar* against the Department of the Interior for its mismanagement of tribal trust lands. Your Administration has credited the settlement of this litigation and similar tribal trust cases as an important, concrete step in reaffirming the federal government's responsibilities to Tribes and individual Native Americans throughout the country. If it were not for Elouise, it is possible that Native American trust beneficiaries would still be waiting for their day in court. Over the course of this nearly 15-year long legal battle, she demonstrated her unwavering commitment to justice, government accountability, and upholding the rights of Native people.

Long before her fight for trust land management reform, though, Elouise devoted herself to growing economic development in tribal communities. As Treasurer for the Blackfeet Nation, she founded the first tribally-owned national bank located on an Indian reservation. Native individuals, businesses, and governments have often not met their full economic potential due to lack of access to capital and financial services on reservations. Elouise saw these challenges on her own reservation and put forward a ground-breaking solution that embodied the principles of tribal sovereignty and self-sufficiency that are so important to all tribal communities. Through Elouise's efforts, this Blackfeet National Bank evolved into the Native American Bank, Inc., which now provides the promise of economic opportunity to more than 20 tribes across the country.

Elouise's tireless work to seek justice and economic development for her tribe, Native Montanans, and Native communities across the nation served as an inspiration to all of Indian Country. I urge you to honor Elouise Cobell's legacy of fighting for the rights of Native Americans with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Thank you very much for your consideration of this extraordinary honor for an extraordinary American.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United State Senator

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