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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6450

MIKE ANDREWS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
JENNIFER ROMERO, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

January 31, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are deeply concerned that the January 23 memorandum directing an immediate hiring freeze for Federal programs will have a disproportionate impact on American Indian and Alaska Native communities. We request that you direct the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management to ensure agencies that provide essential services to Native peoples—in particular, the Indian Health Service and the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education—are exempt from the hiring freeze and can continue to hire staff to fill vacancies for all core programs.

The U.S. Government has a solemn obligation to fulfill its treaty and trust responsibilities for Native peoples—an obligation that includes providing services such as health care, education, social services, and law enforcement to Native communities. Even before the hiring freeze was announced, Federal agencies that provide these services were struggling to recruit and retain a qualified workforce, with personnel vacancies consistently cited by the Government Accountability Office and agency inspectors general as a major factor in the lack of available essential and basic services for Native peoples.

For example, Indian Health Service medical facilities regularly face vacancy rates that meet or exceed 20 percent for physicians, nurses and other key clinical providers—forcing facilities in many tribal communities to reduce access to critical medical services and threatening necessary accreditation by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The Bureau of Indian Education continues to experience similar staffing problems despite decades of Congressional findings supporting the need to recruit and retain teachers and other support staff critical to providing Native children with quality education. In fact, the Bureau has 100 vacancies posted as of this month – the midpoint of the 2016-2017 school year.

Law enforcement agencies in Indian country also lack sufficient personnel. The Indian Law and Order Commission noted in its 2013 report to Congress that there was a 50 percent staffing shortfall for law enforcement officers in Indian country. Since the issuance of that report, tribes have continued to highlight the existence of a significant law enforcement shortage in Indian country and its impact on public safety in tribal communities.

In short, any freeze in hiring for Indian programs—whether temporary or permanent—threatens to make the challenges outlined here worse. We urge you to reconsider the freeze as it applies to Indian programs and to direct affected agency heads to take whatever actions are necessary to fill positions at programs that serve American Indians and Alaska Natives.

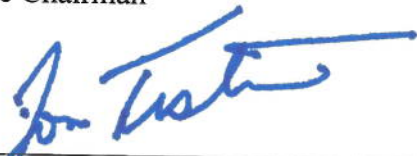
Sincerely,



Tom Udall  
Vice Chairman



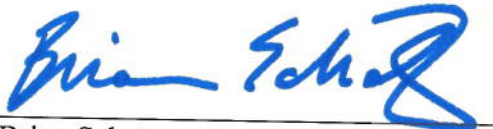
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



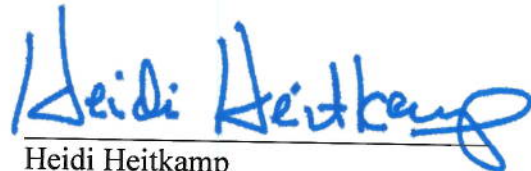
Jon Tester  
United States Senator



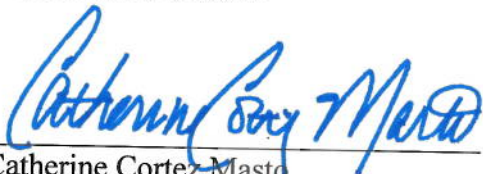
Al Franken  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



Heidi Heitkamp  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

CC: Mr. Mark Sandy, Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Ms. Kathleen McGettigan, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management  
Mr. Norris Cochran, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Mr. Jack Haugrud, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior