



April 3, 2023

President Jeff Stiffarm
Fort Belknap Agency
656 Agency Main Street
Harlem, MT 59526

Re: Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act 2023

Dear President Stiffarm:

On behalf of the Milk River Joint Board of Control (MRJBOC), I write to fully support your 2023 language of the “Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 2023”. This bill would provide certainty for irrigators, support the development and rehabilitation of important water infrastructure and result in long-term economic benefits throughout our region on and off the reservation.

Without Congressional passage of this settlement, the Montana Water Court may soon begin adjudicating water rights in the Milk River Basin. This would undo the agreements and solutions that your team has been working so hard on and we have supported since the 2001 Water Compact between the State of Montana and the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Litigation would not only be costly for the stakeholders, but it would also waste resources and jeopardize existing water uses and businesses in the basin.

We are long-standing neighbors of the Fort Belknap Indian Community and commend your teams’ efforts to work tirelessly to settle the water rights. Settlement will spur economic development on the reservation and allow the hi-line and surrounding areas to continue operations with the full rehabilitation of the St. Mary canal. We praise your negotiation efforts and support them fully. If we can help any further, please do not hesitate to reach out to Jennifer Patrick or myself.

Sincerely,

Wade I. Jones
Board Chairman

Milk River Irrigation Project Joint Board of Control

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