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United States Senate

February 28, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Brock Long
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Zinke, Secretary Perdue, and Administrator Long:

I write today urging your immediate attention to the crisis caused by record snowfall facing the Blackfeet Reservation, the Fort Belknap Reservation, the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, Glacier County, and Golden Valley County in Montana. Specifically, I request that you expedite federal assistance requested by these communities and the State of Montana as the snow continues to cover homes and close schools. In addition, I request this assistance at all stages, including when flooding threatens these communities as a result of excessive snowmelt.

According to the National Weather Service, the snow records in such locations as East Glacier may break accumulation records for the month of February and the 2017-2018 winter, including more than 80 inches since February 1. In recent days, several winter storm systems have caused severe snowdrifts, extreme cold, and blizzard conditions. As a result, hundreds of people in northwestern and southeastern Montana have been stranded in remote areas and are unable to restock firewood or food as state, county, local, and tribal roadways have been closed.

Although tribal and county leaders, the State of Montana, and local officials are conducting life-saving work to assist stranded families, this work is time-consuming and costly. It is possible that the response to these efforts, as well as the floods anticipated by excessive snowmelt, will outstrip their ability to pay for response and recovery efforts.

This would include assistance from the Department of Interior through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA Emergency Management personnel are responsible for BIA's activities regarding response and recovery to disasters that occur on federal trust lands, in this case the Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Northern Cheyenne Reservations located in Montana. It is critical that response support is provided to the impacted Tribes to effectively coordinate response efforts with BIA staff and interagency partners, working government-to-government.

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GREAT FALLS
(406) 452-9585

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(406) 449-5401

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(406) 257-3360

BILLINGS
(406) 252-0550

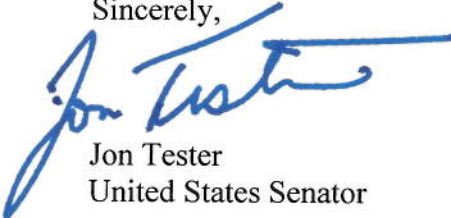
MISSOULA
(406) 728-3003

The snowfall also puts an incredible strain on agriculture operations. It is critical that sufficient technical assistance is delivered to affected producers to ensure that programs like the Livestock Indemnity Program are fully utilized if necessary. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program will also play a key role in recovery efforts. Whether it carcass disposal, windbreaks or shelters, it will be essential to implement conservation practices to prepare for future events.

Finally, FEMA can play a critical role in the response and recovery efforts and I appreciate Administrator Long's offer to support State efforts. Should the weather situation worsen and a Major Disaster be declared by the President, I would request that Administrator Long expedite any assistance required by the residents of these communities, including Individual Assistance, Individual Housing Assistance, or Hazard Mitigation Assistance in order to prevent flooding from future snowmelt. Moreover, I appreciate the efforts of Administrator Long and FEMA Region VIII to enhance coordination with state, tribal, and affiliated partners, including the Army Corps of Engineers, to provide equipment and personnel in the State.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to work together in the swift response and recovery for these Montana communities and thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester
United States Senator