

[Insert Date Here]

The Honorable Sen. Jon Tester  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
*Nathan\_Wyatt@tester.senate.gov*

The Honorable Sen. Steve Daines  
320 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
*Riley\_Oleary@daines.senate.gov*

The Honorable Rep. Matt Rosendale  
1037 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
*Johnny.Rubin@mail.house.gov*

RE: Support the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Settlement Act

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Representative Rosendale

We need your leadership in the United States Congress to help pass the “Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Settlement Act of 2021 (Act).” Our Tribal leaders have worked for over thirty years with the Department of the Interior, the State of Montana, Tribal members, local communities, irrigators, and other water users to develop a bill that would honor our Treaties and finally confirm the Fort Belknap Indian Community’s (FBIC) Winters’ Indian water rights.

The Act would provide FBIC funding we desperately need to repair outdated infrastructure and expand water infrastructure that supports our tribal ranchers and farmers, spurring job opportunities and economic development while providing safe, clean, drinking water for our Tribal communities. Safe drinking water is especially necessary in the southern part of the Reservation that has been devastated by water pollution left behind by gold miners. The Act also would settle FBIC’s damage claims against the United States and avoid costly litigation.

Additionally, the Act would help FBIC restore some of our homelands that were taken from us by the United States—even under threats of starvation—and resulted in years of Federal mismanagement of our lands and water. These lands include portions of the Grinnell Notch, a critical area necessary for watershed management that includes sacred grounds that are essential to our traditional ceremonies and religious practices. We can better manage our ancestral wilderness lands, which have suffered under BLM management and neglect.

Finally, our Act would confirm the water compact that FBIC negotiated with the Montana State Water Rights Commission, that conducted over 100 meetings with local counties, irrigators, and water users and that the Montana State Legislature overwhelmingly passed in 2001. This water compact includes compromises that will benefit both Tribal and non-tribal water users in our area.

Please help to honor our treaties and pass our water settlement as soon as possible.

Sincerely,