

# United States Senate

February 9, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

Thank you for inviting me to join you and some of my colleagues today at the White House. Americans rightfully expect all of us to work together to ensure future generations are able to succeed and inherit a nation even better than the one you and I were born into. I also wanted to take this opportunity to share with you what I am hearing directly from Montanans.

Montanans know the best government is an accountable and transparent one. That is why I remain committed to working with you and your Administration—with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents—to clean up our broken campaign finance system and strengthen ethics laws regarding lobbyists. During your successful campaign, you consistently spoke out against the flood of money that drowns out the voices of hardworking Americans. I agree with that sentiment and welcome the opportunity to clean up our broken campaign finance system with you. I recently introduced three pieces of legislation that will increase transparency in our campaign finance system and return power back to all Americans.

I also agree with your plan to increase the lobbying ban pertaining to Executive Branch officials from two years to five years. This is a bipartisan issue that I believe we could work on together to enact. Transparency and public accountability are vital to the success of our government, and I believe we can go further to both tighten the rules regarding lobbying activity and to improve the way that we are holding ourselves accountable to the American public.

It is critically important that we support our veterans and honor their commitment to our nation. That is why I am very concerned over the impact that the federal workforce hiring freeze would have on our nation's veterans. I appreciate you taking steps to exempt certain critical positions at the Department of Veterans Affairs from this executive order. However, I remain concerned about a number of other employees who were not included, and believe that without further exceptions, timely care and benefits for veterans could be greatly impacted. In particular, I urge you to exempt Veterans Benefits Administration and Board of Veterans Appeals employees directly involved in the resolution of claims and appeals from the hiring freeze. We have over 450,000 veterans awaiting resolution of their appeals and some of them have been waiting for years. At such a critical time, it is important that we not take a step backwards. Further, I am hopeful that additional exemptions will consider the number of health care support and administrative staff – such as those in the Business Office – who play a critical role in connecting veterans to care and reimbursing community providers for care delivered to veterans. Many veterans seek employment in the federal government. These brave individuals

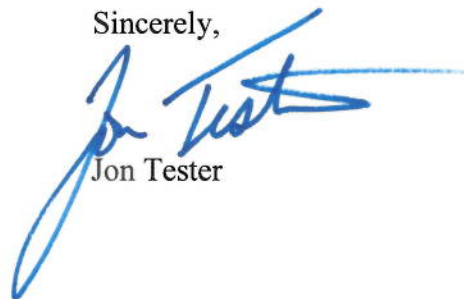
are in the process of transitioning from military to civilian life and may be disabled. An exemption on their behalf would send an important signal to them and their families, and would help ensure that we are not standing in the way of them finding meaningful employment.

We all share a responsibility in ensuring Americans are able to easily access the resources they have earned. That is why I am concerned by recent communications with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). I recently sought assistance from CMS on behalf of Montanans who rely on Medicare, and have been informed that CMS will not be responding to inquiries from Congressional offices at this time. This is deeply troubling and has immediate negative impacts on the Montanans we proudly serve. The recent communication ban puts Montana seniors at risk and I hope we can work together to open up better lines of communication.

Last but certainly not least, Montana's economy and heritage are closely tied to our public lands. Public lands support more than 60,000 jobs in my state and provide nearly \$6 billion to our economy every year. Efforts to sell off these lands or transfer them to the states are irresponsible and a real danger to our western way of life. You will quickly find that small business owners, hunters, anglers and everyday Americans are united in their opposition to these reckless proposals. Montanans are asking us to be strong advocates for protecting these lands and I stand ready to work with you and your Secretary of the Interior to ensure they stay in public hands.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today to discuss the many important issues facing our country. Montanans have asked me to work with you to strengthen the middle class and create high-paying jobs. They have also asked me to hold you accountable when you push policies that do not work for Montana. I know we will not always agree, but by working together, we can ensure future generations have the opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester