

# United States Senate

March 4, 2024

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
950 Constitution Ave, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Attorney General Garland:

I am reaching out today regarding your upcoming trip to Billings, Montana and the Crow Indian Reservation. I appreciate you taking the time to tour these communities as well as meet with local leaders and law enforcement officials. During your trip, I ask that you listen to folks on the ground and learn more about the devastating impact fentanyl is having on Montana and how the Department of Justice (DOJ) can act aggressively to help combat this scourge.

Recent reports have highlighted the fact that Mexican drug cartels are active in Montana, including on Tribal reservations. It is critical that the DOJ continues to build strong relationships with these local communities in order to combat this rising threat and ensure criminals are held accountable. Your visit today and the ongoing work from local DOJ officials play an important role in combatting drug trafficking in Montana.

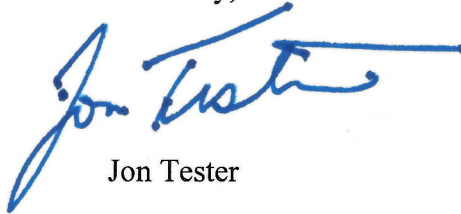
Cartels are specifically targeting Indian Country because of a dangerous combination of legal loopholes, under-resourced law enforcement, sparsely populated communities, and exorbitant profits, and it is devastating Tribal reservations as well as other communities in my state. Profits for these cartels soar the farther they get from the southern border. A fentanyl pill that costs a few dollars in a major city, can go for far more in a state like Montana.

I have heard directly from Montanans about how cartels are targeting Native women and using homes on reservations as safe houses and distribution hubs. They are able to operate with impunity because of complex jurisdictional rules and the fact that Tribal law enforcement agencies have been under-resourced and under-staffed for decades. This problem is also directly connected to the ongoing Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) crisis, as communities are reporting more instances of sexual abuse, human trafficking, child abuse and domestic violence.

During your trip, I encourage you to ask local officials if they have enough resources to respond to their law enforcement needs. I believe you will hear about the need for more Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents and resources in order to support local law enforcement efforts and combat international drug trafficking operations. You will likely also hear about the need to ensure that these investigations lead to prosecutions in order to hold criminals accountable and send a strong message to anyone considering committing these crimes in Montana.

We cannot continue to allow cartels to take advantages of holes in our justice system. I appreciate you traveling to Montana to hear directly from Tribal members, law enforcement officers, and community leaders in Montana who are on the front lines of this crisis. I encourage you to do everything possible to ensure they have the tools and resources they need to keep their communities safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jon Tester