

United States Senate

June 18, 2024

Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

As you work to finalize a domestic supplemental package request to submit to Congress, I ask that you address the catastrophic failure that occurred yesterday on the Milk River Project near Babb, Montana. The Milk River Project in north-central Montana supplies water for the irrigation of around 120,000 acres of land and some municipal water systems. The Milk River Project's primary and most important feature is the St. Mary's canal.

Yesterday, both of the siphons on the St. Mary's canal burst causing thousands of gallons of water to flood the surrounding area. While it will be impossible to assess the full extent of the damage until the water slows, it is clear that this failure has already caused extensive damage to nearby businesses, roads and power lines. It is also clear that the failed siphons will need to be replaced.

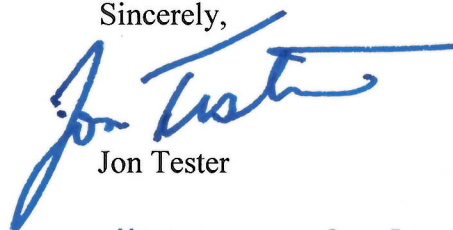
The timing of this failure could not be worse because hundreds of farmers and ranchers are currently depending on the Milk River Project to irrigate their crops. Again, while it is too early to know the overall effect this failure will have on irrigation, it is clear that this catastrophic failure will harm the farmers and ranchers that rely on the Milk River Project. Without the ability to convey water through the St. Mary's canal, the irrigation season will end much earlier than anticipated.

This incident occurred on the Blackfeet Reservation and we know it has already damaged local infrastructure. As we work to address this situation, I ask that your Administration communicate and consult directly with leadership at the Blackfeet Reservation.

Addressing the damage caused by the floods and rebuilding this critical infrastructure will require support from Congress. The cost will be far too great for the local communities to meet the current cost-share requirements. Furthermore, this will not be a simple project to design and construct. As such, it is critically important that resources are made available to begin this process without delay.

I will stay in close contact in the coming days and hours as I learn more about what will be required to address this crisis. I stand ready to work with your Administration to support the citizens of north central Montana.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester