

October 4, 2017

Senator Jon Tester
Senator Steve Daines
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester and Senator Daines:

As faith leaders in Montana we recognize our responsibility to care for God's gift of clean, safe water. Water is a fundamental component of all life. For many faith communities, water is part of sacred rituals such as baptism.

Because water is such an integral part of our physical and spiritual wellbeing, we are working to protect and conserve water in our own communities. Across Montana, we are conducting blessing of the water events to highlight the importance of God's gift of water, as well as remind our communities that we must never take for granted or squander it.

We are calling on policymakers to join us in caring for water. We ask policymakers to work diligently and tirelessly to ensure that we all have access to clean water, whether that be from our tap or in our waterways and wetlands. We urge Congress to ensure that funding is made available to provide infrastructure that supports clean water in the US. It is Congress' responsibility to provide proper resources to the Environmental Protection Agency to safeguard clean water. In particular, we call on you to provide critical funding for the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. When properly funded and implemented, these laws ensure that our water supply is clean as well as reliable, and that we have access to healthy waterways and wetlands.

Any federal budget should provide the necessary resources to promote water quality standards. The pollution of waterways and the erosion of critical water infrastructure continue to be a public health threat. The infrastructure that support clean water in the United States is in dire need of repairs. In the next 25 years, \$1 trillion will be needed to repair and expand U.S. drinking water infrastructure. A 2013 report released by the Environmental Protection Agency found that 55 percent of streams and rivers across the country are in poor condition to support aquatic life.

Montana has more than 170,000 miles of streams and rivers and contains the headwaters of three watersheds: St. Mary's River, Columbia River, and Missouri River. The waterways and ground water in Montana are valuable parts of God's creation vital to supporting all life. They need our protection. In addition to providing valuable recreation opportunities, food sources, habitat, and much needed drinking water, healthy watersheds make us more resilient to threats posed by wildfires.

Robust funding will be needed to improve water quality in the United States and in Montana, particularly for those disproportionately impacted communities whose health has suffered because of water pollution.

As communities of faith across a broad spectrum of traditions, we understand water as a symbol of preservation, cleansing, and renewal. Water is a gift from God. We hope that you will join us in committing to protecting clean water so that we can ensure the health and wellbeing of our communities and all creation.

Sincerely,
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