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United States Senate

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INDIAN AFFAIRS

April 11, 2017

Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Mr. Fenton:

I understand Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will soon be facilitating a number of listening sessions with tribal governments to solicit Indian tribes' input in updating the agency's tribal consultation policy. As you prepare that schedule ahead of the finalization of the renewed policy by August 2017, I ask that you hold at least one of those sessions, if not more, in Montana to ensure Montana tribes' voices are heard in this process. Furthermore, I would ask that you hold that listening session in a central location in Montana to maximize participation.

Montana tribes are all too familiar with natural disasters and states of emergency. For example, the Fort Peck Tribes experienced an extreme weather event last June. Severe storms and straight-line winds destroyed or damaged over 100 homes and businesses on the reservation, leaving families homeless and without the resources to repair their roofs. The majority of the families impacted lacked insurance or could not afford to purchase tarps to cover their roofs as rain continued to pour. Despite the entire Montana delegation's support for this request in the form of a letter to Mr. Craig Fugate, FEMA could not accommodate the tribes' request for an emergency declaration because their crisis did not meet the agency's required magnitude.

More recently, the Chippewa Cree Tribe faced a crisis when their water system froze and broke, leaving approximately 115 residential homes, the Rocky Boy Head Start facilities, Stone Child College, and the Chippewa Cree Tribal Justice Center without water. The tribe did not bother filing for a FEMA emergency declaration, however, because the cost to remedy the situation did not rise to the agency's threshold.

Montana tribal leaders and homeland security directors have expressed a strong desire to provide their input on the FEMA consultation policy. Given their experiences in these times of disaster, including with FEMA, I believe meeting with tribal leaders and members in person in Montana will provide constructive perspectives on how to facilitate a stronger government-to-government relationship with Indian communities in unexpected times of need.

I appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator