# Chief of The Blackfeet Nation

**Earl Old Person, Chief**
P.O. Box 850
Browning, Montana 59417
(406) 338-7521 or 338-7276

SENATE JUDICIARY
Exhibit No. 7
Date 2-5-07
Bill No. SB 323

Governor Brian A. Schweitzer
Office of the Governor
Montana State Capitol
Box 200801
Helena, Montana 59620-0801

January 26, 2007

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

As the Chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe, I am writing in support of the elimination of the Certificate of Public Advantage (COPA) for Benefis Healthcare in Great Falls, Montana.

Benefis Heathcare has gone to great lengths to serve the Native American population in Montana. Recently, Benefis opened the first and only Native American Welcoming Center in any hospital in the State of Montana. This center provides a place of solace, meditation and worship for Native American patients as well as their friends and families during times of illness and hardship. Our tribal members have had many favorable comments regarding this service and have informed me of their appreciation.

In addition to planned charity care, Benefis writes off approximately $94 million annually in unrecovered costs from patients who cannot afford to pay their medical bills. This includes uninsured or underinsured populations as well as those covered Medicaid or Medicare.

And as the community's only not-for-profit hospital, Benefis provides a full range of services including an ER, ICU, NICU, mental health, air ambulance, and other services that lose money every year. Benefis continues to provide these services because of its commitment to the people of Montana. It is only able to do so by subsidizing these activities with dividends from revenue generating services. Although COPA was created in lieu of competition ten years ago, it is clearly defunct in purpose today. And though the need for COPA no longer exists, COPA's effects are soon to be increasingly punitive, especially as Benefis prepares to enter the bond market.

Therefore, as Chairman and Chief of the Blackfeet Nation, a sincerely request your favorable consideration to eliminate the Certificate of Public Advantage for Benefis Healthcare.

Sincerely,

Earl Old Person, Chairman/Chief
Blackfeet Tribal Business Council