



## State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee

66th Montana Legislature

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June 25, 2020

Sent via email

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Representative Gianforte:

As the Montana Legislature's liaison with tribal governments, we write on behalf of the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) urging swift hearing and passage of the FBIC Water Settlement Act of 2019.

The Fort Belknap water compact passed the Montana Legislature in 2001 with overwhelming support as part of a now decades-long effort to settle federally reserved water right claims through negotiated compacts instead of litigation. FBIC is one of only two tribal governments in Montana still awaiting resolution.

The FBIC has waited long enough, as have thousands of other water users whose rights cannot be finalized by the Montana Water Court without Congressional ratification of the compact. It's time to put the final piece of legislation in place. The Act will protect both the state and the tribes' water rights, improve the local economy of the Hi-Line through an influx of money and resources, meet the need for critical water saving infrastructure improvements, and provide the tribes with safe, clean water.

As the *Winters* tribes who obtained the first recognition of federally reserved, constitutionally protected water rights, it's an unfortunate irony that the Gros Ventre and the Assiniboine Tribes of the FBIC may be the last in Montana to have those rights settled. Please lead the way for Congress to take swift action to finally resolve this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Sen. Jason Small, Chair

  
Rep. Rae Peppers, Vice Chair

cc: President Andy Werk, Fort Belknap Indian Community

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June 25, 2020  
FBIC Water Settlement Act of 2019 letter

Exhibit 8