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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6450

MIKE ANDREWS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
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September 25, 2015

The Honorable Mike Enzi  
Chairman  
Committee on the Budget  
U.S. Senate  
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Budget  
U.S. Senate  
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member,

We write regarding legislation referred to your Committee, S. 1497, a bill to exempt the Indian Health Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and certain other programs for Indians from sequestration. We respectfully request that your Committee advance this legislation as quickly as possible to ensure that we are protecting programs affecting American Indians and Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations in the United States.

Sequestration included in the Budget Control Act of 2011 had disproportional impacts on the programs serving AI/ANs established to fulfill the federal government's treaty and trust responsibility to our first Americans. For example, the Indian Health Service is the only federal agency providing direct care that had to absorb the full 5.2 percent sequestration cut. Other health service programs such as the Veterans Administration, Community Health Centers, and Medicare were only cut by 2 percent.

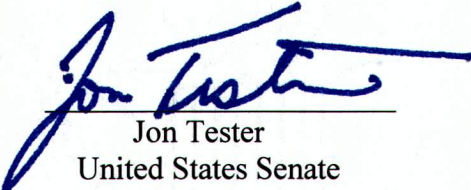
The FY 2013 sequestration cut over \$500 million from federal programs in Indian Country. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was cut by \$120 million, impacting 1.7 million AI/AN people. The Indian Health Service was cut by \$220 million, impacting 2.1 million people. Beyond tribal programs, sequestration's impact extended to other programs critical to Indian Country including Impact Aid, Workforce Investment Act, and mental health funding

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 reduced sequestration cuts in FY 2014 and FY 2015 while extending Budget Control Act sequestration of mandatory programs through 2023. As such, there is the looming threat that we may have to return to sequestration levels for FY2016 should a budget deal not be reached. While I believe we must reach a new budget deal, we cannot allow sequestration-like cuts to return for Indian Country. Cuts will devastate these already underfunded vital programs. Furthermore, given that the poverty rate on reservations has climbed to 40 percent, such an action would continue to drive Indian communities further down the socioeconomic ladder.

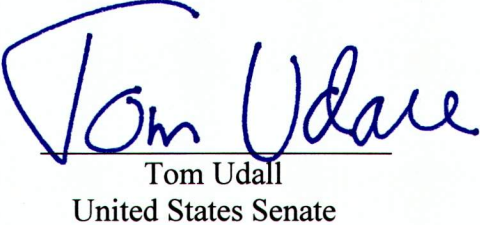
Tribal governments and national tribal organizations have been seeking an exemption from sequestration since the Budget Control Act of 2011 took effect because it threatens the fulfillment of federal treaty and trust obligations to tribes and disproportionately affects some of the poorest people in the country.

The constant risk of sequestration paralyzes planning in Indian Country and diminishes the safety and growth of Indian communities. For these reasons, we must move to exempt Indian Country programs from the harmful effects of sequestration. If you have any questions, please contact Kenneth Martin at the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs at (202) 224-2251 or via email at [kenneth\\_martin@indian.senate.gov](mailto:kenneth_martin@indian.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Jon Tester  
United States Senate



Tom Udall  
United States Senate