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Tester Pushes DeVos to Support Montana's Public Schools

Senator Calls on Education Secretary to Help Recruit More Teachers and Cut Red Tape for Rural Classrooms

(U.S. Senate)—U.S. Senator Jon Tester is holding Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' feet to the fire when it comes to supporting rural Montana schools.

Tester is calling on DeVos to back his effort to recruit and retain more teachers at rural schools. Tester, a former teacher and school board member in Big Sandy, also urged the Secretary to cut administrative red tape for Montana school districts.

“These requests come straight from the ground from the folks who work hard every day to provide bright futures for students in Montana’s rural communities,” Tester wrote. **“It is crucial that the Department listen to the needs of Montanans and rural Americans about how to strengthen public education and ensure every student has a shot at success.”**

“School Administrators of Montana appreciates Senator Tester's response to the Secretary's request for information highlighting three areas where the ED can improve services to Montana schools and the children served,” said Kirk Miller, Executive Director of the School Administrators of Montana. **“Montana school and district administrators have expressed the key issues -- recruiting and retaining quality educators, fixing the onerous application requirements for REAP funds, and resources to address accessibility and OCR complaints against schools’ websites -- as critical ways the ED can assist our schools. Senator Tester's response to the Secretary addresses these key issues and we appreciate his advocacy to support Montana schools.”**

Tester specifically asked DeVos to support his [Rural Educator Support and Training \(REST\) Act](#), which provides scholarships and student loan forgiveness to college students who commit to teach for at least three years in a rural school. Tester’s *REST Act* allows school districts to receive funding to reimburse teachers in rural schools for their out-of-pocket costs associated with obtaining their certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

In order to address the teacher shortage in Indian Country, Tester is also sponsoring the [Native Educator Support and Training \(NEST\) Act](#) that extends similar incentives to recruit and retain more teachers in Native American communities.

Tester also encouraged DeVos to follow through on the Education Department’s proposal to simplify the grant application process and provide rural school districts with step-by-step training to complete and submit grant applications. It was acknowledged in an [Education Department report](#) last year that rural schools often do not have the staff needed to adequately complete and submit cumbersome grant applications.

The Education Department is required by law to solicit feedback to better support rural schools and consider their unique needs.

Tester’s letter to DeVos is available [HERE](#).