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Governor Bullock's Budget Prioritizes Job Creation, Language Preservation, Economic Development, and Education for Tribal Nations

(HELENA) – Governor Steve Bullock's budget proposal for the 2017 biennium, released Monday, lays out priorities for investment in jobs, education, healthcare and infrastructure. Bullock is committed to creating jobs and improving education throughout the state of Montana, including Indian Country. In the proposal, there is full section dedicated to Indian Country Economic Development.

"We can't have statewide economic prosperity without economic prosperity for the tribal nations in Montana," said Bullock. "That's why I am committed to funding programs that help create jobs, improve the success rate of Native American businesses, address chronic issues of access to capital and support tribal colleges' efforts to educate Native and non-Native college students in all of the reservations in Montana."

Over the course of the last two years, Bullock's administration, agency directors, and staff have worked closely with each of the tribal nations in Montana through a series of regional, community, and tribal college meetings. These historic meetings included active participation from tribal government officials, educational and economic development leaders, and members of the business community. The results of the meetings helped develop a set of strategies and action items that will help achieve economic growth and sustainability, reinforce the workforce pipeline, and create jobs in Indian Country. These are encompassed in the Governor's Main Street Montana Project.

Key funding proposals in Bullock's budget to help support this goal include:

- Creating the Native American Gap Financing Revolving Loan Program, which will provide support for tribal member-owned businesses that do not have sufficient collateral and equity to access a commercial business loan. This program, in partnership with traditional and tribal lending institutions, will provide collateral/equity support in the form of a cash deposit as security to the lender to offset remaining collateral requirements to initiate a business loan. The budget includes \$500,000 of state special revenue to fund the program.

- Investing an addition \$1.5 million to the Montana Indian Language Preservation Program to continue the efforts of the program. The pilot program, created by the 2013 legislature has been successful in producing Native language material and has generated great community support and engagement. Results suggest that the program has already enabled Native languages to become more accessible to the growing Indian population in both reservation and urban areas, but further investment is needed to continue this important work.
- Continued support of the Tribal College Non-Beneficiary Assistance Program, which provides funding to tribal colleges to support a portion of the costs of educating non-Indian students at the seven tribal colleges in Montana.
- Making \$1.6 million in funding for the highly successful and regarded Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) Program permanent by including the funding in the base budget. The ICED program supports job growth, more access to business capital for native-owned businesses, an increase in workforce development, Native American private business development, and Native American entrepreneurialism.

Bullock's full budget proposal is available at <http://budget.mt.gov>.

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