

Associated Chambers of the Flathead Valley

Community advancement organizations serving Northwest Montana

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
PO Box 200801
Helena, Montana 59620-5529

Re: Letter of Support for a Targeted Opening of Glacier National Park on June 1

Dear Governor Bullock:

Thank you for your strong leadership and early, consistent action on combating COVID-19 in Montana. As a result of your initiatives, and with the support of the citizens of Montana, we are among the most well-positioned states in the country to take the steps you outlined on Tuesday. Governor Bullock, as you deliberate with health advisors, federal partners, and local officials, we would like to request your consideration of an additional item. On behalf of the undersigned organizations and the 3,526 businesses and organizations we represent, we invite you to give your most serious consideration to a targeted opening of Glacier National Park on June 1, 2020.

We think it makes sense, and will be less confusing to the traveling public, to open Glacier National Park on the same schedule as the Montana entrances to Yellowstone National Park. We assure you that we are committed to working with you, your agencies of state government, and the National Park Service to develop and communicate the proper messaging for our member businesses and visitors.

Governor, we understand the challenge with which you are faced to balance health and safety with economic and fiscal health. There is no doubt, however, about the economic impact of COVID-19 on the Montana economy. Over 100,000 Montana jobless claims have been filed since the beginning of this crisis in mid-March. The University of Montana BBER projects a loss of 75,000 jobs, on average, over 2020. They further project a shortfall in state personal income of \$6.4 billion or 11.7 percent compared to pre-COVID projections. Additionally, BBER projects a slow recovery to the state economy for employment and personal income extending well beyond 2022. Moving up the Glacier National Park reopening schedule gives visitors, hospitality and food service sectors, and other sectors, a significant a head start on a better summer season.

Northwest Montana is benefited by a strong health care capacity. There has not been a reported COVID-19 case in Flathead County for over a month and there are no hospitalizations.

Kalispell Regional Healthcare was selected by the Army Corps of Engineers for the construction of an Alternate Care Facility to provide additional capacity in case of pandemic escalation. It is scheduled for completion at the end of May. Thanks to your actions, testing capabilities are increasing, personal protective equipment is well-supplied, and tracing ability is improving. In short, as the gateway communities for Glacier National Park in Northwest Montana, we are well-prepared to provide a safe reopening of Glacier National Park for residents, visitors, and employees.

For these reasons, the undersigned 12 chambers of commerce, economic development, and tourism organizations in Northwest Montana support a targeted reopening of Glacier National Park on June 1, 2020. We are confident that together we will find the right balance between reducing COVID-19 cases and returning Montanans to work. Thanks again for your leadership and dedication to the safety and prosperity of all Montanans.

With Warm Regards,

ASSOCIATED CHAMBERS OF THE FLATHEAD VALLEY

Rebekah King, Executive Director
Bigfork Area Chamber of Commerce

Cameron Johnson, President
Columbia Falls Area Chamber of Commerce

Blanche Flanagan, Executive Director
Eureka Area Chamber of Commerce

Connie McCubbins, Executive Director
Evergreen Chamber of Commerce

Joe Unterreiner, President and CEO
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce
Convention and Visitor Bureau

Diane Medler, Director
Kalispell Convention and Visitor Bureau

Pam Carbonari, Executive Director
Kalispell Business Improvement District &
Kalispell Downtown Association

David Fetveit, President
Lakeside-Somers Chamber of Commerce

Myranda Cravens, Executive Director
Libby Chamber of Commerce

Jerry Meerkatz, President and CEO
Montana West Economic Development

Carol Cunningham, Manager
Polson Chamber of Commerce

Kevin Gartland, Executive Director
Whitefish Chamber of Commerce

cc:

Flathead County Health Officer, Hillary Hanson
Glacier National Park Superintendent, Jeff Mow
U.S. Congressman Greg Gianforte
U.S. Senator Jon Tester
U.S. Senator Steve Daines