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### **Sen. Tester Helps Montana Access New Cancer Technologies**

People refer to our awe-inspiring Montana as “Big Sky Country,” which is about as fitting a descriptor as I can imagine. No less awesome than the sky above our heads, however, is the vast goodness and decency of our citizens. In Montana we rally and circle the wagons when a member of our community is suffering, with everyone lending a hand. When the trouble has passed, we like to give thanks. It’s been this way for generations, and I know it will continue in the future.

Our own Senator Jon Tester has demonstrated this truly Montana trait by working to advance policy changes that must occur to alter the course of cancer detection and treatment.

I appreciate Montana’s strong social fabric when I reflect on the way cancer, a disease that will rob us of an estimated 2,160 loved ones in our state this year, has an impact on our communities. It is not uncommon, given our diffuse population, for friends and family, even physicians, to make long journeys to those in need of care. As a cancer patient myself, I truly appreciate this challenge.

Because of our geography, quick and ready access to early cancer screenings is crucially important. When caught in its early stages, before widespread metastasis, the five-year cancer survival rate hits just under 90%. As cutting-edge as many of our oncology treatments are, it’s early detection like mammograms and colonoscopies that make up our strongest weapons against the disease.

Sadly, physicians don’t yet have screens for most cancers. In fact, we have early detection capabilities for precisely five, which means the vast majority of cancer deaths are from a type for which we lack a screen – such as cancers of the pancreas, liver, and stomach. The good news – great news, even – is this is changing. Before the Food and Drug Administration are multi-cancer early detection tests that screen for dozens of cancer types with just a blood draw. This is excellent news for Montanans who need to travel great distances for preventative care.

It’s important now to think about how our most vulnerable senior populations can get ready and affordable access to these new technologies. Thankfully, Senator Tester has stepped up to circle the wagons. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the Medicare Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening Coverage Act, a crucial piece of legislation designed to fix major obstacles to implementation.

Access to preventative cancer care should be available to all Montanans, but unless Washington acts fast and follows the lead of members like Sen. Tester, coverage for technologies like multi-cancer screenings will take many years to reach the people who can most benefit from them. And even though the bill has strong bipartisan support, greater awareness is necessary if we wish to catch the attention of more representatives on Capitol Hill, get the bill passed this year and sent to the President’s desk.

In just a few months the current Congress expires, effectively resetting the legislative clock on outstanding bills. Meanwhile, cancer marches on the attack, impervious to our political schedules. We owe it to our loved ones who must face this disease and to all Montanans to take the steps to halt cancer’s progress any way we can.

*Sharon Peterson, Executive Director  
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*The Montana BioScience Alliance serves as a hub for Montana’s biotechnology companies, entrepreneurs, laboratories, hospitals, clinics, and universities to commercialize, grow, and sustain globally competitive bioscience companies — ultimately to create high-quality jobs and economic opportunity in Montana. For more information, visit [www.montanabio.org](http://www.montanabio.org), call us at 406-896-5876, or email us at [info@montanabio.org](mailto:info@montanabio.org).*