

Letter from W. M. Black to Gov. Joseph Dixon, July 28, 1921

*Shelby, Montana
July 28, 1921*

Hon. Joseph M. Dixon,
Helena, Montana

My Dear Sir:

I have been requested by several responsible persons in this vicinity to place the following situation before you. . . . Owing to continued crop failures due to drouth, cut worms, and grasshoppers in this county and the counties adjacent to this along the main line of the G.N. Ry. a large majority of the people are in very hard circumstances. They have very little to eat and will have very little to wear to keep them from suffering when cold weather approaches. They will also find it almost impossible to obtain fuel in sufficient quantities to keep comfortable. A survey of the situation reveals that several families at present are not getting enough to eat.

I know of three families right now, Governor, where there are a father and mother and from two to four minor children, and either the father or the mother is unable to work owing to illness or infirmity, the children are too young to take care of themselves. In one instance the mother is almost an invalid, she has three children, the father cannot leave her. . . . All they have had to eat for the past two months has been potatoes, last year's crop, bread and eggs. They sold what little butter one cow made in order to buy a little sugar and syrup. The children are almost naked, and are indeed a pitiable sight. Other instances might also be cited, some better than this, others worse. One family of eight, the mother an invalid, only one cot in the single room shack, the oldest child about twelve years of age, no chairs or dishes, only tin plates and

spoons. The father is working on the railroad section but cannot meet expenses.

The Red Cross has an agent here, a man, but he does not seem to grasp the situation. . . . A woman could do much better for the reason that she could visit these homes and have personal, heart to heart talks with the mothers in the homes. Many of these people feel proud and in many instances do not feel like soliciting aid, altho they are in dire need. Those of us who are more fortunate believe that a wider and better movement should be set on foot in order to take care of these unfortunate people, and at least these small children. They are really the ones who are suffering. They need more for the upbuilding of their bodies than the food they are now obtaining. They will become our future citizens.

Immediate aid for some is required in the line of food and clothing. A system of relief which can be extended as it is required should be instituted for what will be required in winter weather. We understand that work can be obtained over in Washington on small tracts of land, which may also be rented. But these farmers cannot leave in many instances; some have not the railroad fare. But many could leave and obtain work if they had the transportation. Others might find work in the localities in this State where crops are good if there was a system of finding where this work could be had, and some means of getting the man there. These people are all American born largely, and feel it is their fault that they are in the condition they now find themselves and do not like to ask for aid. . . .

Now Governor, I have written at length on this as I feel deeply about it. I know the people personally, some are my neighbors. I believe a

more extended action should be taken by the Red Cross, or some such organization for this relief. . . .

We feel that the present representative of the Red Cross. . . has not grasped fully the situation which exists. Many of these people donated eagerly what they could from their small living during the war. . . and now, owing to no fault of theirs, they are certainly entitled to relief. . . .

Yours Respectfully,
W. M. Black

Source: *Montana Governors Records, 1889–1962. Manuscript Collection 35* [box 7 folder 33]. Montana Historical Society Research Center. Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 179.