

# United States Senate

October 3, 2011

Dr. Thomas Insel, Director  
National Institute for Mental Health  
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

Dear Dr. Insel:

I am contacting you with a suggestion from one of my constituents that would allow us to better combat mental illnesses across the United States. This proposal would establish a substantial cash prize to the first individual or organization that develops a biologically-based screening tool to reliably determine whether a person suffers from schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Such a prize should come from existing research funds through the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

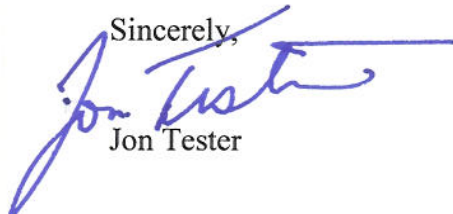
My home state of Montana has one of the nation's highest suicide rates. One-in-five Montana families are affected by serious mental illness. Effective mental illness treatment is one of the keys to lowering this rate, but the methods for diagnosing serious mental illnesses are still far behind in comparison to other fields of medicine. Instead of using concrete scientific tools to determine if an illness is disrupting the neural circuits of the brain, psychiatrists and psychologists must work off of behavioral questionnaires.

The lack of a biological screening tool leads to misdiagnoses, improper prescribing, and a general mistrust of the mental illness treatment system. These problems are costly both in terms of health and dollars. The direct and indirect costs of severe mental illnesses exceed \$300 billion annually. Many of those costs are absorbed by the federal government through spending on medical care and for disability payments. Further research could bolster mental illness research while saving taxpayer dollars.

This prize would be similar to the original X Prize that was used to stimulate the development of commercial space flight. It could dramatically improve the country's mental illness treatment system and maximize the impact of the federal dollars that go to support that system.

I look forward to your thoughts on this project. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester