



VOTE

VOTER GUIDE

A LOOK AT MONTANA LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES

See inside for candidates' thoughts on property taxes, communicating with constituents, and more. ▶



BILLINGS GAZETTE
COMMUNICATIONS

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Montana has numerous races going unopposed

HOLLY K. MICHELS
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For the first time in nearly three decades, Montanans will be picking representatives for two spots in the U.S. House. That came after the 2020 U.S. census determined the state had grown enough in population to regain the seat lost in the 1990s. The newly drawn western district will feature busy primaries with nine candidates: five Republicans and three Democrats, as well as a Libertarian.

The GOP primary includes Ryan Zinke, who was previously elected to Congress and also was appointed to be secretary of the interior in the Trump administration. The other Republicans running include former state Sen. Al Olszewski and Kalispell resident Mary Todd, as well as Matt Jette of Missoula and Mitch Heuer of Whitefish.

On the Democratic side, Missoula lawyer Monica Tranel, Bozeman nonprofit executive Cora Neumann and former state Rep. Tom Winter are running. The race also includes Libertarian John Lamb of Bozeman.

Eleven candidates are running in the Eastern district, including incumbent Republican U.S. Rep. Matt Rosendale. He'll be challenged in the primary by Billings residents James Boyette and Kyle Austin, as well as Charles Walkinghamchild of Helena.

Democrats running include Mark Sweeney of Phillipsburg, and Penny Ronning and Skylar



THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record

The Montana House of Representatives holds a floor session in the State Capitol.

Williams, both of Billings. The race also includes Libertarians Samuel Thomas, Roger Roots and Sam Rankin, as well as Independent Gary Buchanan.

Two seats on the state Public Service Commission are open. The districts were recently redrawn by a panel of federal judges after a lawsuit pointed out they were wildly unequal in population. Democrats did not field a candidate for District 1, which features a three-way primary

between incumbent Republican Randy Pinocci, K. Webb Galbreath of Browning, and Arlo Christianson of Great Falls.

In the PSC's District 5, there is a contested primary between Republicans Ann Bukacek of Kalispell, Dean Crabb of Marion, Derek Skees of Kalispell and Joe Dooling of Helena. For Democrats, the primary is between Kev Hamm of Helena and John Repke of Whitefish.

Incumbent Jim Rice and Bill

D'Alton of Billings are both running in the nonpartisan race for state Supreme Court Justice No. 1. In the No. 2 seat incumbent Ingrid Gustafson of Billings is running to keep her seat against Helena Judge Michael McMahon and James Brown, the chair of the PSC.

In the Legislature, all 100 seats are up for re-election in the state House. Republicans have gained on their majority in that chamber over the last several cycles, and at least 19 GOP candidates are al-

ready guaranteed victory as they are running unopposed. There are five Republicans running unopposed for state Senate seats, of which there are 25 up for election this year. That's in addition to about 10 seats in the Legislature where only Republicans have filed and will feature primaries. That information is according to the Secretary of State's website as of 5 p.m. Monday.

Two Democrats in the House are running unopposed.

In a late-January speech at an event kicking off the filing season for Republican legislative candidates, state Rep. Rhonda Knudsen, of Culbertson, said the Montana Republican Leadership Legislative Campaign Committee was working to field a candidate for every district in the state Legislature up for election this cycle. Knudsen is one of the Republicans running unopposed this year.

Knudsen focused on tying Montana Democrats to the national party, saying "No Montana Democrat should get a pass for standing in lockstep support of Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi."

"That's exactly why we're working so hard to run Republican candidates in every race across the state. And take a look, I think we're meeting our goal," Knudsen said, gesturing to Republicans filling the steps inside the state Capitol behind her. "We are going to come back with an even stronger legislative majority in November."

Please see **Primary**, Page L14

THE FIVE QUESTIONS

1 It has never been easier to communicate with a large audience and yet some voters never hear from their legislators. If elected, what will you do to communicate with your constituents? Are lawmakers obligated to initiate discussions with constituents about legislative work, or is it sufficient to speak to lobbyists and witnesses who testify before committees during the session and leave it at that?

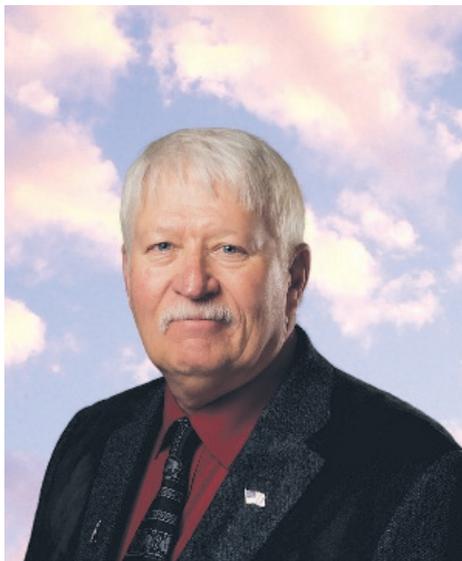
2 Based on what you know about voters in your legislative district, what are their three most important issues? Tell readers what are you're going to do to address one of those issues? This open-ended question is a good opportunity for you to address and issue not raised by this questionnaire.

3 Escalating real estate values are pushing tax reappraisals upward. What would you do to protect homeowners? Would you support the proposed constitutional initiative to cap taxes, although legislative analysts say the bill will harm local governments by reducing revenue? Is there another way?

4 Lead in the drinking water at Montana public schools has been a problem for years. Nearly half of the 222 schools that tested for lead in February found lead levels so high that water fixtures had to be shut off. A lack of funding for replacement plumbing is a continuing problem. It isn't uncommon for schools to shut the water off wherever test results are high. What you do? Would you get state funding and planning involved in this issue, or would you leave it up to each school district? Please explain your approach.

5 Which government agency needs reform more than any other? Explain your pick, then tell us how you're going to fix it.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



James H. Bergstrom—R

Age: 68

Occupation: Owner/operator of Little Belt Feeds, marketing and delivering NutraLix products in central Montana

Family: Married to wife Sherri for 40 years. A son named Dan and his wife, Jolene, who have two daughters. And a daughter named Amanda who is with her husband named Bryce with three daughters.

Education: Graduated with high honors from The College of Great Falls in 1994. Received a bachelor's degree in business administration, a bachelor's of science accounting, and associate's in computer science.

Past employment: Self-employed rancher/farmer for 15 years, a financial advisor with Ameriprise Financial for six years, a software sales representative for 10 years, taught for two years at Dawson Community College, taught agricultural education and industrial arts for three years at Judith Gap Public School, taught for nine years at Hobson Public School, and was an FFA advisor for 12 years.

Past political experience: Two terms as a school board member at Judith Gap Public School

Endorsements: Montanans for Limited Government

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1. During my years of living in House District 30, I have met many people from all walks of life. I personally know doctors, farmers, lawyers, ranchers,

bankers, pastors, insurance agents, real-estate agents, veterinarians, manufacturers, large business owners, small business owners, school administrators, cooperative managers, water district managers, self-employed people and people who work for wages. These people are who I will turn to for information about legislative issues. I will reach out to them and I will encourage them to reach out to me if they have a concern or interest in legislation before the House.

2. The most serious issue for House District 30 and the entire state is the ongoing drought. The legislature will need to find a way to help drought-affected farmers and ranchers. A tax break for those affected by the drought would be a good option. The Black Butte Copper Mine North of White Sulphur Springs will have a positive economic impact for House District 30. I support the Black Butte Copper Mine project. The Musselshell Judith Rural Water System will be a great benefit for thousands of central Montanans. I support the Musselshell Judith Rural Water Project.

3. I do not support the proposed constitutional initiative to cap taxes. This initiative only caps taxes on the residence that you live in. It does not cap the taxes on land, business property or rental property. The taxes on this other

property will increase if the initiative is passed. We need to defeat this initiative and let the legislature come up with a fair and equitable solution. I would suggest a sliding scale system where taxes can only increase a specific percent per year.

4. We need to do comprehensive testing of all schools to determine which schools are effected and the degree of lead contamination in those schools. This is an issue that the state will need to be involved in with planning and funding. The funding for fixing the lead issue should be based on the severity of the lead contamination. The schools with the highest level of contamination should be funded first.

5. The judicial branch of state government needs to be reformed. The state Supreme court needs to have more transparency. They need to be under the same open meeting rules that the legislative and executive branches of state government operate. On April 6th Judge Michael Moses from Billings blocked several bills dealing with voter integrity. These bills were voted on and passed by the legislative branch and signed into law by the executive branch of Montana. The judicial branch of government should not be able to block the other two branches this close to an election.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Randy Gregg—R

Age: 31

Occupation: Small business owner, Performance Farrier Services

Family: Eldest of seven children

Education: Whittier College, Utah Valley University, Montana State University Farrier School

Past employment: Small business owner, ranch hand, campaign staffer, field representative for Republican state senator

Past political experience: Field representative for a state senator, congressional intern US Congressman Elton Gallegly "Republican" Chairman Gallatin Young Republicans, vice president Utah Valley University College Republicans

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1. When I am elected I plan on speaking plainly and directly to my constituents that made it possible for me to humbly serve. Part of serving as a state legislator is holding regular town hall meetings throughout the district from churches, ranches, bars, gas station

parking lots and everything in between. I will also plan on submitting a column to the local newspapers, something I do already on a regular basis as part of my campaign. My cellphone and social media are also listed so it really is as easy as picking up the phone.

2. The three top issues in Montana House District 30 are ag and property rights; these are the very foundation to the Montana economy as a whole. Montana farmers and ranchers have been having a tough go of it from economic factors to ridiculous environmental laws. The second is the Black Butte Mine. The Black Butte Mine will be critical for Montana's future from providing jobs for thriving families to providing copper and cobalt for the future of American economic dominance. The third issue is making sure we have the smallest most efficient state government in the country

3. I would like to get property relief to those that truly need it, especially retirees on fixed incomes. There are a few tools to utilize in the legislature's figurative toolbox to address this. In all re-

ality the state has very little to do with local property taxes. Property taxes are used by our counties and municipalities to fund their operations. We can though as citizens stop voting for ever increasing levies on our local ballots.

4. Lead in drinking water is of grave and serious concern for Montanans thankfully though our state legislators have at least initially addressed this issue with recent appropriations of ARPA funding. If this initial round of funding does not address all the lead plumbing issues. I definitely think this is an issue of immediate concern that should be addressed until rectified

5. A government agency that needs reform more than any other is DEQ. We have seen with abundant clarity from the delayed approval processes of the Black Butte Mine the need for a more efficient and receptive DEQ. This can be done while simultaneously increasing well paying job opportunities in the state by expediting critical approvals and maintaining the environmental standards we as Montanans have come to expect from our state agencies.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Frank J. Smith—D

Age: 82

Occupation: Driver for veterans from the Fort Peck Reservation

Family: Four children and eight grandchildren

Education: Graduated high school in Poplar, completed two years in the Air Force, and completed C.D.L. training F.P.C.C.

Past employment: Drove for USPS and owned own business with 27 employees for 19 years. Drove for a year in the oil field.

Past political experience: Five years on the Fort Peck Tribal Council, 10 years in the Montana House of Representatives, and eight years in Montana State Senate.

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1. I have made it a point to attend

most tribal board meetings and some other meetings that are called for community input and also school meetings.

2. The main problem that has been discussed has been our water problems, health and labor. The water problem has been corrected by the new water, Dry Prairie Rural Water. Our labor problems are being worked on through our tribal and state training programs.

3. We tried reducing the taxes, but the price of the land keeps going up and that's hurting the taxes that have been reduced. I have given a lot of thought to what we can do. I hate to say it, but the only thing I know to do is restrict the amount of land that can be sold out of state. Because the problem is they can sell a million-dollar home in California and buy two of them up here. It's a touchy subject. The value of land is going up faster. How can we compete against something like that?

4. We've got to get a grant program out there for the schools and have them

put directly in for a grant, or a different program like that. When we appropriate money for repairing schools, the next thing we know is it's going to raised wages or something like that and not repairs. We've got so many schools that are in bad shape. We've got people on school boards that are not accustomed to some of the problems. The only thing we can do it about lead in schools is get a grant program where the money goes directly to that.

5. It's like the officials you read about in the paper about every month or so. A government official gets caught in some scam or something. How do we bring that up? You know, that's pretty hard to do. It took us 160 years to get where we are now. And now, it will take another 160 years to change things around. What are we going to do about our government? It starts with who we elect. We always vote for our friends and relatives, not who is qualified. We got to know who is qualified.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Kaci Walette—D

Age: 41

Occupation: Registered nurse

Family: 19-year-old son, Tade, and 13-year-old daughter, Kashlyn

Education: ASN from Montana State University-Northern

Past employment: Fort Peck tribal councilwoman from 2017-2021

Past political experience: Roosevelt County Democratic party chairwoman in 2004. Fort Peck tribal councilwoman from 2017-2021.

Endorsements: Rep. Johnathon WindyBoy, Margaret Campbell (Former House District 31 Rep.), State Sen. Mike Fox, House Minority Whip Tyson Running Wolf, Rep. Marvin Weatherwax, Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy, Senator Susan Weber, Rep. Rennalea Whiteman-Pena.

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1. If elected, I would make myself available to my constituents via social media updates, meeting regularly with city council, tribal councils, school districts, etc. Social media makes it so much easier to keep ev-

everyone up to date on what is going on with a touch of a button. I still like meeting face to face as it gives people a sense of security when you see those that speak up for their communities out in the community.

2. I think the three most important issues in my district are the dwindling local economy, law and justice and education. I would like to tackle education. The more consistent an early education begins the more successful a person has at graduating high school. I think that trades should also be taught in high school, as not all children are cut out for college. The more educated a person is the less likely they will be out committing crimes which are sadly hurting my district and driving people away from investing in real estate and small businesses.

3. With the increasing inflation that everyone is now facing these days, I would support capping homeowners taxes for a moratorium period until we can come together and find a solution where all parties are walking away with some satisfaction. Rural areas like my district are facing aging infrastructure issues where increased revenue is much needed for projects that have been placed on the back burner for far too long due to lack of funding.

4. I would support state funding for all schools with a lead drinking problem in

their school systems. Schools should be a safe place for learning without any worries about their basic needs getting met. Our education administrators and teachers have enough on their plates educating our youth, providing safe drinking water shouldn't be another burden for them to bear.

5. I think the State Agency of the Office of Public Instruction needs the most reform. I think our education system has been lacking for many years, evidenced by lagging test scores and lower graduation rates. We need to support those on the ground who are with our children everyday, from kindergarten through our state university systems. We can implement trades at a younger age for those children who might not have college as a next avenue to pursue after college. Teaching our youth basic life skills so they can leave high school and become a contributing, functioning young adult to help our local and state economy flourish. Teacher recruitment and retention along with better pay is much needed in the state. Infrastructure is also needed in many public school systems as seen by the unsafe lead drinking water levels in over half of our schools in the state. There is so much more we can do for our youth so they can get the education they all deserve.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Greg Kmetz—R

Age: 65

Occupation: Retired business owner of welding and machine shop, and a retired welding instructor (MCC)

Family: Married to Alice, three adult children, and four grandkids with a fifth on the way.

Education: Bachelor's degree in industrial education from the University of Wyoming

Past employment: Self-employed business owner for 41 years

Past political experience: None

Endorsements: Montanans for Limited Government

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1. It is way important to communicate to your constituents, if elected I would submit articles to the Miles City Star and post on my Facebook page as well as publish my cell number, folks

could call or text.

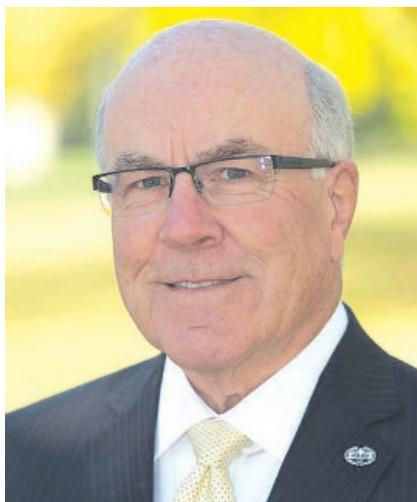
2. Devastating meth addiction is now commonplace in every community. Anyone in law enforcement starting with Austin Knudson our state attorney general, to every person in law enforcement says the main problem stems from our open southern border. Fix the unfunded liabilities, mainly this is the retirement packages that have been promised to our teachers and state employees back when investments in the market had a higher return. I would be a strong proponent of building a new power plant in Colstrip. If the state could oversee the construction and operation of this venture, this could possibility cure our unfunded liability problem.

3. Tax reappraisals are forcing taxes higher, as property values increase this makes the mills worth more money so counties have more tax money. Most county officials are not complaining, a pay raise without even asking. Perhaps this is a local problem, wouldn't it refreshing to see local officials not accept the "pay raise" and deal with this issue

locally? Probably wishful thinking.

4. Really, I have personally worked in many school's boiler rooms and mechanical rooms as well as many other commercial and public buildings (pipe welder by trade) and I'm not sure I believe this. I would want test results before the water entered the school because there is no such thing as lead pipe, at least I've never seen any. I doubt a few joints of copper soldered before lead-free solder hit the market 20-plus years ago could cause any measurable jump in the lead count, just doesn't make sense to me.

5. I watch the Montana Supreme Court side with the Democrats on almost every issue, I would like to see Supreme Court candidates declare their party affiliation, now days the D or the R tells a lot about who we really are. The more we know about any person running for office helps us make better decisions. If this idea became a house bill it would for sure end up in litigation and another House bill would never see the light of day, that's just how it works with activist judges.



We all have good reason to be disgusted with Congress.

There is not one action, one law, one decision that comes out of our federal government that is not poisoned by the influence of money. Agriculture, defense, education, you name it, deep pocketed special interests routinely bribe our representatives with promises of cash.

All progress is stopped because special interests pay politicians to do their bidding, not yours. The only way to create beneficial public policy is to elect representatives of good faith, motivated by the NEEDS of the people and not by the WANTS of special interests.

Jennette Rankin broke the male dominance of Congress and forever changed our country for the better. We can do it again. Send Sam Rankin to Congress and break the unhealthy hold corporate, PAC and lobbyist money has on our representatives.

rankinforcongress.com

Paid for by Rankin for Congress, Libertarian, 1645 Parkhill Dr. #3, Billings, MT 59102

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Mike Willems—R

Age: 48

Occupation: Probation and parole officer for Montana Department of Corrections

Family: One daughter and one grandson

Education: Attended Miles Community College from 1998-2000, Dickinson State University in 2002, Correctional Officer Basic Academy in 2005, Montana Law Enforcement Academy in 2007, and Probation & Parole Officer Basic Academy in 2018.

Past employment: Police officer, drug task force agent, and a correctional officer.

Military: US Marine Corp 1992-1996, North Dakota National Guard 2001

Past political experience: None

Endorsements: MFPE

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1. A Representative's primary duty is to be the voice of their constituents. While I

will speak with anyone that can help solve a problem, my duty is to my constituents. I will respond to, inform, and work with those that are in my area to the greatest extent possible

2. Public safety: Nothing happens without ensuring the safety of our citizens. When law enforcement officers and prosecutors do their jobs, the state legislature need to do theirs as well. Career criminals need to be separated from our good citizens, addicts need treatment and rehabilitation, and offenders placed in our communities need real consequences if they fail to reform. Also, inflation and the economy: Our Montana employers need to be supported. They are begging for workers. A trade school education needs to be encouraged and shown respect. And, I will oppose any effort that drastically infringes on our constitutional rights.

3. Residential valuation and property tax is a major issue statewide. Retired folks on Social Security are especially at risk for losing their homes. The proposed initiative transfers tax burden to new home buyers, to small business, and agriculture. This is not the right answer.

Well-designed legislation that protects homeowners from being taxed out

of their homes is the answer, but not by transferring property taxes to others. Property taxes support schools and local government. We need to make sure the government lives within its means as well. As a working man, property tax is very real to me.

4. Drinking water in school must be safe. I have been informed there are state and federal grant and loan programs to help defer the cost of addressing this issue. In fact, there seems to be a large pot of money that could work here. I will look for a plan that protects our students while not breaking the bank.

5. Public safety, our prisons, law enforcement, and parole are real issues. Drugs are everywhere, often coming north from Mexico, and impacting and threatening Montanans. Mental health and suicide are always in the news. My focus is on keeping our communities safe, locking up career criminals and keep them away from our children, reducing youth suicide, and where possible, rehabilitating inmates to become productive members of the workforce. My strong background in law enforcement allows me special insight into what practices are successful and what fail.

HOUSE DISTRICT 30



Robert T. Goffena—R

Age: 75

Occupation: Retired farmer/rancher

Family: Wife, married over 50 years, nine grandchildren

Education: Bachelor's degree in agriculture business and economics from Montana State University

Past employment: Worked through college in the oil field and served six years in the Montana National Guard.

Past political experience: Served 12 years as a Musselshell County commissioner and was chair of Deadman's Basin Water Users Association as well as other boards and committees dealing primarily with water issues. Gave talks to other river associations as well as the NRCS Annual meeting. Served on the State Water Court Advisory Committee.

Military: Six years on the Montana

National Guard

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1. Legislators should communicate with their constituents directly by calling them in cases in which you need impute. You represent them. Lobbies imputes are only needed when you need facts to back up your districts needs. Listen to your people.

2. The three most important issues in my district are water for domestic uses and agriculture, developing and maintaining use of our resources such as coal, gas and oil, and our farm and ranch products. I've done this as a county commissioner and irrigation board member. My job is to educate Helena of our problems and our answers needed as related by my district's needs.

3. Rising taxes due to inflation is a problem. I would continue to base taxes on the current uses not on best uses. Taxes are needed but government budgets should be limited to needs not wants. Conservative values should rule budgets. Less regulation and encouraging business should rule government.

4. Lead is a minor problem in my district. Water in general is a big problem. We are developing a water project from the middle of the de-watered Musselshell River basin near Harlotown with a water line from wells in the mountains though three counties to the east end of Musselshell County. The funding is mostly in place. a large part will come from the Federal Government.

5. Government agencies in general seem to over regulate. Cut regulations to the minimum so business can grow and prosper. Less government is better government.

HOUSE DISTRICT 40



Greg Oblander—R

Age: 65

Occupation: Doctor of chiropractic

Family: Married for 43 years to JoAnna, with six total children, two of whom are adopted, and 20 grandchildren.

Education: Bachelor's in human biology, doctorate in chiropractic from Logan College in Chesterfield, Missouri

Past employment: Montana Power Gas Utility for 17 years

Past political experience: Involved in legislative issues with MT Power, Montana Association of Petroleum Landmen and Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association (MTVRA)

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1. I would make regular posts to my website, Facebook page, and I would email those who opt into my email data base.

2. The highest inflation rate in 40 years is decimating people's budgets and ability to maintain their lifestyle. They are losing ground. The perpetual increasing of property taxes is having a huge impact on all property owners. Business costs increase, home ownership becomes more difficult and our seniors on limited incomes are stretched to the breaking point.

3. Family values and parental rights are under attack in today's culture and learning environment. Parents need to be involved. It is the responsibility of the legislature to deal with difficult issues and problems. Various options need to be explored in depth. There are no simple answers to this difficult question but we need to find a better way to protect the taxpayers.

Would you support the proposed constitutional initiative to cap taxes, although legislative analysts say the bill will harm local governments by reducing revenue? Further analysis is needed.

Is there another way? All options should be evaluated.

4. I do not know enough about this issue to comment in minute detail. I have seen where the Huntley Project School District has had water quality issues and it has been complicated for them to access and find viable solutions. They involved both State and EPA agencies in efforts to solve their problem. I would suspect each school district would need to approach their individual circumstances in a similar manner.

5. The Veterans Administration needs significant reform. We, as a country, have asked our military to sacrifice much for our security, freedom and liberty. Yet, we fail to provide them with the care they need. Health care is abhorrently slow and unsatisfactory.

Why does it take weeks or even months for them to receive the care they need? We also need to reduce the number of suicides.

I plan to work with our state legislature and Montana congressional delegation to find a better way. My years of experience in health care gives me a unique perspective to address these VA concerns.



Elect Judge McMahon for Montana Supreme Court

If you expect a Supreme Court Justice to follow the law and not public, political, partisan or personal agendas, **vote for Judge McMahon.**

- He has a conservative and common sense philosophy and consistently conforms his decisions to constitutional, statutory and common law precedent.
- He highly values the Montana judiciary's nonpartisan independence as a way to ensure that judicial decisions are based on the law and not on political, partisan or personal agendas.
- He was born and raised in Helena and practiced law for over 26 years before being elected as a District Judge in 2016.
- Learn more at ElectJudgeMcMahon.com

Paid for by McMahon for Montana Supreme Court, PO Box 1478, Helena, MT 59624-1478

COUNT ON CUSTER

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- FORMER SMALL BUSINESS OWNER
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- PRO SECOND AMMENDMENT

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- Montana Chamber of Commerce Rated Her 100%
- Montana Contractor's Association Rated Her 90%
- Montana Stock Growers Endorsed

COUNT ON CUSTER TO BE A CHAMPION FOR: Agriculture, Fair Elections, Education, Infrastructure, Labor, Local Control, Main Street Business, and Natural Resources.



Paid for by Custer for SD20, Box 1075 Forsyth, MT 59327

HOUSE DISTRICT 40



Bruce Hoiland—R

Age: 69

Occupation: City of Roundup Compliance Department

Family: Married to Roma Jean for 48 years with three children, James, Matthew, and Stephanie

Education: Roundup High School and Northern Montana College

Past employment: Hoiland Ford owner, Bighorn County fire chief, Oftedal Construction, State of Montana

Past political experience: Ten years on the Roundup City Council

Military: None

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1. I will communicate with emails and

phone calls. If a bill effects my district constituents I will call officials in my district and ask for local information pro and con.

2. The Keystone pipeline. And coal mining and Coal Board funding. Also, transgender athletes in women's sports. I will push to fully fund the coal board for years to come. County governments receive funds directly from coal taxes, however city governments do not directly receive any funds. The coal board is a chance for cities to receive funding from coal. For example, the children in Roundup have a new playground to play on in the city park. Melstone quick-response unit has a new building built with some coal monies. Counties, schools and hospitals also do receive coal board funds.

3. I will look at a program that will limit the amount of tax increase due to reappraisals. Perhaps a 3% annual increase in property tax which would also give govern-

ment more money as inflation happens. The current system is setting up taxpayers for a train wreck as I believe what goes up will someday come down. When housing needs are less and less demand for property the values will come down.

4. This is a great place for state and local COVID funds to be invested. The other options could be to invest in water projects that deliver cleaner water to everyone. It might help to let parents in these school districts know there is a problem with lead levels in drinking water in a school.

5. We have a shortage of inspectors in the building codes division. New commercial projects are often on hold because inspections have not been done or permits issued. The number of inspectors needs to be increased and the wages need to be competitive. Rural areas depend on these build permits.

HOUSE DISTRICT 50



James Reavis—D

Age: 38

Occupation: Public defender for the state of Montana.

Family: Part of a large Montanan family. His mother runs a 200-head cattle ranch outside of Boulder, and his father is an architect who specializes in preserving historic buildings. His sister is finishing law school and his brothers are involved in welding, architecture, healthcare, and metal fabrication across Montana. His girlfriend is a dog groomer in Billings.

Education: Law degree from the University of Montana, a master's in public

administration from the Middlebury Institute, and a bachelor's in history from Washington State University.

Past employment: Served in a variety of roles within the Montana Public Defender's Office for the past decade, including advocacy in different courtrooms across the state; teaching legal education courses; and managing/mentoring other attorneys. He has also interned for Senator Max Baucus, worked at a law firm during school, and spent years working at McDonald's.

Past political experience: Elected National Delegate to the 2020 Democratic National Conventional member of the Montana Democratic Party Platform Convention; former state committeeperson for the Lewis and Clark Country Democrats; former candidate for Butte City Judge; current precinct chairperson for the Yellowstone County Democrats.

Endorsements: Former Attorney General Nominee Raph Graybill; Former Congressional Candidate John Heenan; Former Billings Judicial Candidate Juli Pierce; Former State Senator Kendall Van Dyk; Current State Representatives Rob Farris-Olsen, Mary Ann Dunwell, and Danny Tenenbaum; Billings West Teacher Rob Stanton; Attorney Gene Jarussi; Former U.S. Senate Staffer Jim Corson.

Online campaign info: reavisformontana.com

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Address: PO box 22301, Billings, MT 59104

Phone: 406-498-2185

1. When legislators stop listening to their constituents, it's time to change the legislators. The issues and concerns Billings voters tell me about when I meet them going door-to-door will be my agenda for the legislative session. I'll keep constituents up to date on important bills through my website and social media. If you email or text me, I'll respond. If you call me, I'll answer. What you tell me impacts how I will vote. I will listen to the voters and anyone with good ideas, but I will not be enthralled by TV pundits, lobbyists, or party bosses.

2. The three most important issues voters are telling me about are property taxes/housing costs, public safety, and the price of healthcare. Seniors on fixed incomes need protection from property tax hikes.

As a public defender, I see how public safety impacts our Billings community. Crime deterrence is brought about by certainty of punishment, not severity of punishment. Instead of building more prisons, we need to provide more funding and training to help police solve more crimes. Using my background in criminal law, I'll work on fixes to our probation rules and juvenile laws to promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

3. The Legislature needs to give local governments more creative options to pay for critical services besides property taxes, such as revenue reallocation from hotel, marijuana, and alcohol taxes. We should reduce property taxes for residential, commercial, and industrial properties (Class 4), revisit rates for high-end business equip-

ment (Class 8), and repeal a tax break for stock traders.

I do not support CI-121 because we don't need to bring California dysfunction to Montana. CI-121 would shift property taxes from residential to commercial properties. This would hurt Billings businesses and increase rents because many apartments are classified as commercial property.

4. This is a solvable problem! The federal bipartisan infrastructure law has allocated billions of dollars for lead pipe replacement. I will sponsor a statewide plan that will use those federal dollars to replace the lead plumbing in every Montana school. School districts will have input on project implementation but guided by a master plan designed to cut red tape and get lead pipes out of our schools as quickly as possible. Lead in our schools' water is a health hazard for our youth and its removal must be a top priority.

5. I would pick DPHHS and its approach to mental health. Too often local resources cannot treat a person with a mental health crisis, so they go to Warm Springs instead. Unfortunately, inadequate funding and mismanagement recently caused the federal government to pull funding from Montana State Hospital, putting lives at risk.

I'll use my experience representing patients to rewrite our commitment laws to provide for effective local treatment. I support establishing multiple community mental health hospitals around Montana so patients can remain closer to their homes and support systems. A rebuilt state hospital would serve as a last resort.

HOUSE DISTRICT 50



Erin R. Tate—D

Age: 41

Occupation: Therapist

Family: Shares a home with partner and two cats

Education: Master's degree in social work from Simmons College in Boston, Master's degree in English from Kansas State University. Received undergraduate degree in English at Schreiner University in Kerrville, Texas.

Past employment: Spent the past year in private practice as the owner and operator of her own small business. Before that, was a social worker for Billings Public Schools for three years. Before that she was a clinician for a nonprofit day school in Massachusetts.

Past political experience: Volunteered for past candidates, this is her first race.

Endorsements: MFPE

Online campaign info: www.erinformontana.com

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Phone: 781-296-6830

1. Legislators belong to the people and should communicate with their constituents regularly. Lobbyists don't necessarily represent the interests of every-day Montanans, so making efforts to actively communicate with the people who elected them is extremely important.

2. My district has seen a rise in crime, a rise in mental health concerns, and consistent rises in property taxes. Since mental health is my area of focus, I would like to work with the community and the legislature to build programs that serve the mental health needs of every citizen. We can do this by working with the Legislature to increase funding for our public agencies as well as invest in heavy recruitment of qualified mental health professionals.

3. Our real estate values continue to push upward due to out-of-state corporations buying up our properties. I would be in favor of taxing these corporations. CI-121 would be a terrible option for us to enact as it would cripple citizens' abilities to purchase

new homes and push long-term home owners out. I am not in favor of this initiative.

4. We need to reinvest in our students, our schools, and our educators. My approach would be to re-examine the funding structure of how each district receives money. I would also ask that cities work to replace pipes going into public education facilities. I am a strong believer that by working together we can meet the needs of our students, our educators, and our community as a whole.

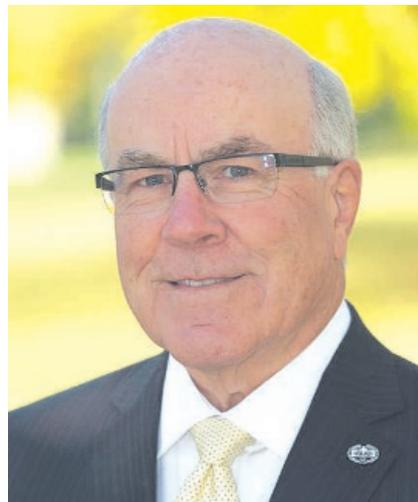
5. Our government agencies work hard every day to meet the needs of residents. I believe that the mental health system is currently overtaxed and under manned/under funded; however, an injection of cash won't fix this problem. Destigmatizing mental health, creating programs in our public agencies that serve individuals wrongly incarcerated, building community mental health access points are a start. This does require funding. It also requires qualified providers and an investment from the community at large.



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HOUSE DISTRICT 55



Lee Deming—R

Age: 66

Occupation: Retired educator

Family: Married to his wife, Sherry, with two children named Ryan and Annie. He has six grandchildren, Shayla,

Kennedy, Kian, Finley, Maguire, and Bailey.

Education: Attended Helena High School. Sought higher education at Carroll College and the University of Montana. His highest degree is a master's in educational administration.

Past employment: Educator, construction worker, Sawyer.

Past political experience: None

Endorsements: Dan McGee-Four term State Representative serving two years as Speaker, Two term State Senator serving 2 years as President Pro Tem; Vince Ricci-Four Term State Representative; Ken Miller-Two term State Senator; Krayton Kerns-Four term State Representative.

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1. Currently, I am personally going door-to-door to meet with constituents and to ask if they have any questions or concerns. Once elected, I will publish a weekly legislative update in the Laurel Outlook and will encourage people to contact me throughout the session. I will also

post a notice on my website, and Facebook page with a request that my constituents use these platforms as well to keep in touch. Lobbyists and witnesses are two pieces of representation that may reflect narrower sectors of interest, I will also take what they say under consideration.

2. I have heard concern over inflation, of course. The economic devastation of the lockdowns has also been on people's minds. School issues have been a top concern as well. In the near term, Montana can only mitigate the effects of inflation by cutting our constituent's costs through reducing taxes at every opportunity. Lockdowns can be addressed at the State level by putting the decision to close businesses into the hands of the business owners and their customers. We should never again give one person the power to close businesses or to determine which are "essential" and which are not.

3. Tax reappraisals can be adjusted to reflect the changing market in real estate. Perhaps this would also be a good opportunity to take a closer look at how tax money is spent on all levels in order to find savings where possible. I will take care of the taxpayer while I serve in the Legislature.

4. To the extent that State funding would have to be appropriated through increased local taxation, I would not support that approach. Perhaps the State could provide guidance but otherwise no increased tax funding. Repairs to contaminated drinking water systems could be funded through the Treasure State Endowment Program. Districts would be responsible for solving the problems that would be unique to them. And if Federal money can be used to address problems with drinking water in Flint, Michigan it could certainly be used to address water issues in Montana schools.

5. I would prefer to highlight an agency that I believe is working for Montanans rather than one that isn't. In my opinion, Montana's Attorney General is doing everything he can to protect Montana. His fight against the mandates has been heroic. His brief in the Armstrong case-the Roe v. Wade case for Montana-was brilliant in defense of life. The work done by his office and his public statements are reflective of the best tradition of Federalism as outlined in the body of the Constitution and the Tenth Amendment. We should applaud Attorney General Knudson for his work in this regard.

HOUSE DISTRICT 55



Curtis Schomer—R

Age: 38

Occupation: Miner

Family: Wife, Haley, and three sons, Jaden (14), Duke (two), and Decker (three months.)

Education: Hardin High School

Past employment: Sibanye-Stillwater Mining Co., for the past 15 years.

Past political experience: None

Online campaign info: facebook.com/Schomerhd55

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Address: P.O. Box 1172, Laurel, 59044

Phone: 406-672-9846

1. An open communication channel is what's lacking with many of our elected officials. I will always be easily accessible via my info above and encourage direct communication with my constituents who entrust me with their questions, comments, concerns, and criticisms. I will continually update my Facebook page throughout my tenure in office if elected and encourage feedback. I will also educate my constituents on current legislative matters so they can make more informed decisions. Openly communicating with the residents of Yellowstone County and voting on their behalf will be an honor not taken lightly.

2. Public safety: I will "back the blue" and support policies that make our community a safe place to live.

Career and technical education: I will

focus on enhancing student opportunities in the CTE area, including internships outside school walls. For MT to have a bright future, we must invest in the workingman student.

Affordable housing and utilities: The average employed person can no longer afford to be a homeowner in Yellowstone County. I intend to make sure local working families can afford a home. This is key to the "American Dream".

3. Research I have done suggests the answer is twofold. First, create a thoughtful circuit breaker that protects homeowners from paying high property taxes, especially for elderly fixed-income and low-income households. This needs to be done in a manner that does not reward the out-of-state wealthy that results in an explosion in market valuation. Next, since property taxes go to local governments and support schools, cities, and counties, I support legislation that keeps local government expenses down. This includes limiting locally voted mills that drive taxes up. Ensuring homeowners are not taxed out of their homes is critical to me.

4. Montana schools and its students must have access to safe water. This is

simply non-negotiable. I support district control as the best governance because locally elected citizens are who have their thumbs on the pulse of their community. However, this is a statewide issue, so the state must partner with its school districts in solving the issue. Per a January 2022 rule change, Federal ARPA funds can be used. Funds from State & Tribal Assistance Grants and the Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation Act are also allowable for use. I support dollars being spent on issues such as lead, not on new "woke" programs.

5. Due in large part to the failure of the State Mental Hospital, the agency I am hearing the most about is the Department of Health and Human Services. For me to suggest I can "fix" it, however, is asinine; it's not that simple. What I would do is become as informed on the details of the problem as possible and then weigh in as my conscience and constituents direct. I also have concerns Fish, Wildlife and Parks is not aligned with ensuring local outdoorsmen have access to public lands while simultaneously improving access to wealthy out-of-state hunters/sportsmen. I will fight to keep Big Sky Country open and available for Montanans.

SENATE DISTRICT 20



Geraldine Custer—R

Age: 67

Occupation: Retired clerk and recorder of Rosebud County

Family: Two daughters and twin grandsons

Education: MSUB, formerly Eastern Montana College, no degree

Past employment: Rosebud County clerk and recorder from 1979-2014

Past political experience: Vice chair

Rosebud County Republican central committee, Rosebud County study commissioner, nine terms as Rosebud County clerk and recorder, four terms as state representative for House District 39.

Endorsements: Montana Stockgrowers, Montana Federation of Public Employees and AFL-CIO

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Phone: 406-351-1235

1. I will continue to openly communicate with my constituents if elected to the Senate. I welcome dialogue from my constituents by publicly publishing my phone number and email address. I maintain a website and Facebook page allowing me to share information quickly. The most important work legislators do is in committees. Listening to the testimony on bills is critical in making an informed decision. Reaching out to constituents that are experts in the field being discussed is important in making the best decision. Last sessions zoom technology encouraged remote testimony without a drive to the Capitol.

2. Maintaining our good-paying natu-

ral resource jobs in oil and gas, mining and power production is extremely important to the economy of Montana. Baseload power is key to keeping electricity stable and costs reasonable for industrial consumers and irrigated farmers in Montana. With unemployment at an all-time low, Main Street businesses, agriculture and healthcare are all competing for a marginal supply of trained workers. Workers are not just concerned with a paycheck but also affordable housing and child care. Reliable fast broadband is critical for businesses to stay competitive. I continue to stand for workers to have good-paying jobs that benefit Montana.

3. In 2015 the residential property reappraisal went from every six years to two years. With the inflow of new residents, the demand for housing is exceeding our housing inventory inflating home prices. C1121 is not the answer. It is a tax shift to the other 14 classes of property, from capped out urban to rural and burdens a new homeowner unfairly for the same services. The legislature needs to add a circuit breaker for elderly Montana homeowners living in their homes at least seven months a year based on a ratio of property tax to income for a tax reduction.

4. With lead testing being completed by over half the school districts in Montana, lead in school drinking water is problematic. Lead testing can be free for schools if the tests are sent to a qualified Montana lab, along with a plumbing diagram to get a number for each fixture so the lab can correlate the test to the fixture. Schools have additional funding options like using ESSER monies they already received, or OPI has a limited grant program of 1,000 per school on a first come basis, and additional funds are coming for lead mitigation in the Federal Infrastructure bill.

5. Department of Public Health and Human Services is 48 percent of the state budget with 2,852 employees and every service it administers impacts an individual's personal need. The Montana State Hospital is being cut off from Medicaid and Medicare funding because of infractions. The management plan needs to be revamped and staffing needs to be adequate to prevent accidents and burnout. Trained staff are hard to hire in today's competitive market. Montana may need to offer workers student loan forgiveness, easier reciprocity for licensing, and possibly housing and child care subsidies to attract competent workers to this stressful work environment.

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SENATE DISTRICT 20



Barry Usher—R

Age: 57

Occupation: Business owner

Family: Married to Ann Marie with four children named Jennifer, Katie, Brian, and Hannah. Six grandchildren named Daniel, Regan, Barry, Allison, James, and Shane.

Education:

Past employment: Owner of Beartooth Harley-Davidson from 2002 to present, Beartooth Mahindra from 2021 to present, was a partner at Hawaii Motorsports from

2000-2016, and the owner of Hi Mountain Recreation from 2006 to 2012.

Past political experience: 2017-present Montana State Representative HD40: 2017 Session – Judiciary, Local Government & Human Services Committees, 2019 Session Vice Chair Judiciary & Human Services Committee, 2021 Session Chairman Judiciary & Transportation Committee, 2017/2018 Interim Law & Justice Interim Committee, 2018-present Montana Supreme Court Pre-Trial Diversion Advisory Committee, 2019/2020 Chairman Law & Justice Interim Committee, 2021/2022 Law & Justice Interim Committee, 2019-Present Criminal Justice Oversight Council 2017-Present Vice Chairman NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) Law, Justice & Public Safety Committee, 2019-Present NCSL Executive Board

Endorsements: Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen, Montana Secretary of State Christi Jacobsen, Montana Family Foundation, NRA, AFP (Americans For Prosperity), UPOM (United Property Owners of Montana)

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Billings, MT 59101

Phone: 406-252-2888

1. Hearing from constituents is very important to me. I currently represent an expansive, rural district and work hard to be present in the communities I represent to keep good lines of communication open. Additionally, I keep my social media current, I respond to all emails and phone calls from my constituents and I do reach out to “subject experts” from within the district from time to time to get their input of various issues.

2. Economy/inflation. I propose if we have a revenue excess of projects that we give back to the voters. And, energy. I support oil/gas/coal 100%. God gave it to us, we should use it. There is nothing that comes close to replacing them.

3) Crime/drugs – through Law & Justice Interim Committee, Criminal Justice Oversight Council and the NCSL, I am working with law enforcement, County Attorneys Association, Department of Corrections and the Judiciary, looking for ways to improve our criminal justice system. I do NOT support the Constitutional Initiative 121. This came from a California Law. It is not working there, so why would anyone think it would work in Montana. CI 121 only caps some residential property taxes

which would spread the property tax burden around to all other classes of property tax. I do not know what the long-term solution is but for the short term, I suggest if we have excess revenue, that it be returned to the taxpayers

4. This is a tough question. I, like everyone else, wants to do the best we can for our kids. The problem I see is some school districts do not put money away for capital projects like business do. They spend what they bring in. If they have a capital project they either try to pass a mill levy or they go to the state and ask for money. We need to start requiring school districts to plan and set money aside for capital expenses.

5. Given that it is the largest agency in state government. DPHHS would be at the top of the list. However, after 16 years of Democrat control, most state agencies are in dire need of serious reforms. Current answer is good. I have seen firsthand how our governor, AG, secretary of state, state auditor and Superintendent Arntzen are all working together, aggressively trying to “right the ship.” It doesn’t matter what the legislature does or what the governor does when our judiciary in Montana decides it is going to make law from the bench. Without any check or balance, our judiciary needs reform.

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Utility commission races heat up early

TOM LUTEY

tlutey@billingsgazette.com

A barnburner of a Republican primary has taken shape in the few days that Montana's secretary of state was able to certify candidates for the Montana Public Service Commission.

Flathead legislator Derek Skees, Montana Pro-Life Coalition leader Ann Bukacek, and former U.S. House candidate Joe Dooling, have all filed for the PSC District 5, which includes Flathead, Lake, Lewis and Clark and Teton counties. The current commissioner for the district is Republican Brad Johnson, who is term-limited out.

District 5 and District 1, which include much of the Hi-Line and northeast Montana, were in limbo as a lawsuit over the unconstitutional population differences in the PSC districts played out. A federal court decided the matter last week with a new map that



THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record

In this file photo, members of the 2019 Public Service Commission listen to testimony during a public hearing in Helena.

brought the districts into compliance with the one-person, one-vote rule of the 14th Amendment.

Before the candidate filing

deadline closed, Dooling and Skees were already jousting over the open seat with Dooling telling his social media followers that

Skees had threatened to find a primary opponent to challenge Dooling's wife, Rep. Julie Dooling for the Montana Legislature.

"Let the good times roll. My opponent has threatened both me and Julie multiple times, so far doing his best to keep me out," Dooling said on Facebook. "The same guy that called our constitution a rag. It's going to be a fun race."

Dooling later confirmed the threat was a primary opponent for his wife, not a physical threat.

Meanwhile, Skees was telling his Republican rival to quit the PSC race, suggesting that Bukacek entering the race wasn't good for Dooling.

"Are you sure you want to waste more of your wife's money to fail for the 5th time," Skees texted Dooling. "That may become the record for the most primaries lost without a single victory by a Republican in Montana history. Quite a legacy my friend."

Skees is the past chairman of the Montana House Federal Relations, Energy and Technology Committee, which he served on for eight years. He announced his candidacy at the end of the 2021 Montana Legislature.

Dooling farms near Helena. In the early 2000s, he worked for KLJ Engineering developing infrastructure projects, including the Montana Alberta Tie Line, which transmits power between Great Falls and Lethbridge.

Bukacek might be the better known candidate in the Republican race, having been at the forefront of the anti-abortion movement in Montana for years. A doctor, Bukacek has more recently received national attention for suggesting that COVID-19 deaths have been inflated by the Centers for Disease Control when preexisting conditions were the

Please see **Races**, Page L15

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Primary

From page 2

While fielding candidates proved less of a challenge for the GOP, the party will have several contested primaries. As Republicans have added to their majorities in the state Legislature, the party has also shifted to see more conservative candidates come out of past primaries.

In Eastern Montana, well-known Republican legislators Geraldine Custer and Barry Usher are facing off for Senate District 20, for the seat held by another longtime lawmaker, outgoing Republican state Sen. Duane Ankney. The district runs from north of Billings and Laurel to Miles City and includes Roundup and Colstrip, as well as Forsyth.

Already the race looks to be a battle over which strain of Montana Republican will best represent the district. Custer has branded herself a pragmatist who has aligned with a group of other Republicans to pass things like Medicaid expansion, while Usher has generally voted with a wing of the party farther to the right.

"We're all Montanans. We need to look out for Montanans and quit worrying about who someone voted for and that kind of thing," Custer, of Forsyth, said Monday. "The conspiracy theories need to stop ... I think the Republican Party has been taken over by the John Birchers or something similar. ... I just feel like for anyone that's in the middle of the road that they don't control, there's a lot of hostility out there for us."

Usher, who lives in Yellowstone County, said he thinks he's a better fit for the rural district.

"This race comes down to looking at our voting records," Usher said. "It comes down to we both have voting records and who votes more with your values? I voted with the voters of (this) Eastern Montana rural district better."

After seeing that a Democratic candidate hadn't filed for the seat, Jenna Martin joined the race for House District 52 on Billings' South Side over the weekend. Republican incumbent Sherry Essmann, who was appointed to the seat last June, is running, and she'll be chal-



The Montana State Capitol in Helena.

THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record



In this file photo, members of the House Judiciary Committee hear testimony.

Austin Amestoy, UM Legislative News Service



In this file photo, the Senate Finance and Claims Committee meets.

THOM BRIDGE, Independent Record

lenged by Rodney Garcia, who was in the House in the 2019 session and lost a state Senate primary in 2020. Garcia drew scrutiny after he said during a state GOP event in 2020 he believes the U.S. Constitution calls for the shooting or jailing of those who identify as socialists.

Martin said in an interview Monday she wasn't considering a run until she looked through candidate filings and saw no Democrat had filed in several districts in the Billings area.

"There was just no one and there was no one in the district next to mine and there was no one in the district next to that," Martin said.

At first Martin was uncomfortable and nervous, but then she woke the next morning to a flood of calls and messages on social media offering assistance and support for her campaign.

"Everything I could have needed I got over the weekend from completely random people on Twitter," Martin said. "I

was on the phone for hours this weekend just talking to people that I have never met in real life."

Martin said she has closely followed the state Legislature because of how it intersected with mental health and housing, as well as child care — issues she is passionate about. She remembers hearing a state representative say on the House floor during the 2021 session about child care that he hoped a study would "consider these issues and find ways of making it maybe more

expensive" as a way of encouraging parents to stay at home with children.

That lawmaker, state Rep. Neil Duram of Eureka, is one of the Republicans running unopposed this year.

"When it came time, there was no names on that filing and I felt my stomach just sank and I was like 'OK, this is what we do now,'" Martin said.

Sheila Hogan, the executive director of the Montana Democratic Party, said in an interview Monday that the party fielded strong candidates, and said of the races being challenged, two-thirds of the Democrats running have either won in that district or a similar one.

"They're experienced campaigners," Hogan said " ... These folks are proven campaigners. The rest is just noise. We didn't look for just a warm body. We wanted people with experience, not only as campaigners but as lawmakers and we are meeting our goals."

Tim Warburton is a Democrat running in Billings' House District 46. He filed for the race Sunday. A veteran of a city council campaign, he hadn't planned to run for the state House this year.

"As I watched and saw there were so many races, so many districts that had candidates that were unopposed, I'm really one that's against that. I really feel like voters should have a choice, whether you're a Democrat or Republican."

— Reporter Sam Wilson contributed to this story.

Races

From L13

cause. She became a cause célèbre in national news for spreading COVID misinformation.

In Montana Republican circles, where the politics of COVID and abortion are highly charged and at the forefront of political messaging, Bukacek fits. She also wouldn't be the first candidate for PSC to be an outspoken opponent of abortion. The PSC is a five-member quasi-judicial commission that regulates monopoly utilities, and other service providers like garbage haulers, taxi services and pipelines.

"Concern about our future quality and standard of living motivated me to serve on the PSC," Bukacek said Monday in an email. "I have proven passion for helping people optimize their quality of life."

Flathead County voters will have a big impact on the race. The county makes up 49% of the district population. It also punches above its weight in elections with the second-most Republican vot-



Gazette staff

The Colstrip Power Plant is pictured on Oct. 2, 2020.

ers among Montana counties. Yellowstone County has the most Republican voters but is also the most populated, while Flathead County ranks fourth for population.

"A Public Service Commissioner should give sane, fair, and balanced protection to Montana's energy needs for its citizens' well-being. I will," she said.

This is the first time Bukacek

has run for public office.

A fourth Republican, Dean Crabb, of Marion, filed in the District 5 race late Monday.

Also, a primary emerged in the Democratic race for District 5. John Repke, a retired finance executive joined the race. Repke lives in Whitefish, pushing the total number of Flathead County candidates in the race to four.

Repke said in a press release that he was running to bring "integrity, competency, and professionalism back to the PSC." He joins Kevin Hamm of Helena in the Democratic primary ballot.

Hamm, an internet service provider, announced his candidacy last summer. He's the chief operating officer at Treasure State Internet and Telegraph. He's very outspoken about the need to reset the way the Public Service Commission brings the needs of consumers and utilities into balance.

There are no Democratic candidates in District 1, where Republican Randy Pinocci is seeking a second, and final, term. That means the June 7 primary, a three-way Republican affair between Pinocci, Arlo Christianson, of Great Falls, and K. Webb Galbreath, of Browning, will decide the election.

Christianson didn't answer his phone Monday. His voicemail wasn't taking messages.

Angered by the reporting of a PSC email scandal in which he was involved, Pinocci refused to participate in this story.

Galbreath, a member of the

Blackfeet Tribe, and past Republican legislative candidate, said he decided to run for the PSC because the commission needs new leadership. Rising energy prices are hurting his neighbors, including ranchers.

"I'm a firm believer in reliable, responsible energy. And what I mean by reliable is we don't need to have a thing that went on in Texas happen here in Montana," Galbreath said, referring to the fatal Texas power outage resulting from freezing temperatures in early 2021. "I think Montana needs to explore other options of energy. We have great wind here. That could be an option. Hydro can be an option. And I think solar is a great way. But you know, something that's never discussed is nuclear energy. And I think that has to be on the table."

Galbreath is also a former Marine sergeant, who served his country for a decade. He was a police officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He is currently operations manager for the Blackfeet Tribe.

One person who is a big proponent for nuclear power in Montana is Skees.



We Need Your Help to Put Gary on the Ballot!

We need registered voters to sign the petition, here's how....

Where to sign a petition in Yellowstone County:
**Billings Public Library (south entrance)
510 North Broadway on the following days/times.**

Tuesday 5/10, 17, & 24 from 11am - 1pm • Thursday 5/12, 19 & 26 from 4pm - 6pm
Saturday 5/14 & 21 from 10am - 1pm

Buchanan Capital Inc. located at 14 24th Street Mon - Fri 7:30am - 4pm
Campaign phone number: 406-696-5026 • Email: info@BuchananForMontana.com

Meet Gary Buchanan on Saturday May 21st from 10am - 1pm at the Billings Public Library

BUCHANAN
AN INDEPENDENT MONTANAN
★ FOR CONGRESS ★

Paid for by Buchanan for Montana Committee, Independent, PO Box 2174, Billings, MT 59103



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ignoring the will of the people.**

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that benefits our communities and our state parks?**

**Recreational marijuana is
TAXED, TESTED for SAFETY, and REGULATED**

The TAXES help benefit our communities and state parks

**The TESTING for SAFETY keeps untested and potentially dangerous
products from being consumed by adults**

**The REGULATION keeps the cannabis out of the black market and in the
hands of reputable business owners**

The FUTURE of Recreational Cannabis will be decided by YOU!

**Vote AGAINST
Overturning Recreational Marijuana in
Yellowstone County on June 7th**

Visit betterformontana.com for more information

Paid for By Better for Montana, Jason Smith, Treasurer, 100 S. 24th St W, Suite 1-156, Billings, MT 59102