

VOTER GUIDE

2026 PRIMARY
ELECTION



BILLINGS GAZETTE
COMMUNICATIONS

The Montana State
Capitol in Helena.

THOM BRIDGE,
INDEPENDENT RECORD

LEE MONTANA

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Welcome to the Lee Montana 2026 Voter Guide.

Elections play a direct role in shaping the communities we live in — from the cost of living and access to healthcare to how public lands are managed and how local governments make decisions. This guide is designed to help Montana voters make informed choices by providing clear, accessible information about the candidates seeking to represent them.

As the largest network of full-time journalists in the state, Lee Montana has been — and will continue to be — focused on the issues that matter most to Montanans. Our newsrooms connect people across the region with their public servants, business colleagues and neighbors. We dig into the issues, provide the data

and report on the debates and decisions that affect people's daily lives.

At the local level, reporters in our Billings, Missoula, Helena, Butte and Hamilton newsrooms will serve as your eyes and ears as local races ramp up throughout 2026. That includes coverage of commission and city council seats, mill levies and more — the decisions that often have the most immediate impact on daily life. At the state level, the Montana State News Bureau will cover all major races while also keeping a close watch on key ballot measures.

This year's primary election features one of the nation's most closely watched Senate races, along with crowded eastern and western congressional contests and candidates across Montana vying for seats in the state Legislature. This guide will be available in print and

online throughout the campaign season as a resource to help you understand who is running, what they stand for and how to contact them before casting your vote.

How did we put this guide together?

For the primary election, our goal was to give Montana voters a clearer picture of candidates in five races: U.S. Senate, Public Service Commission, the eastern and western congressional districts, and the state Legislature. For legislative races, we focused on contested races within Lee newsroom coverage areas across the state.

Editors at Lee Montana and the Montana State News Bureau developed five questions for each group of candidates, covering issues we know matter to voters, including affordability,

taxes, public lands, wildlife management and health care. Those questions were sent to candidates using the email addresses listed on the Montana Secretary of State's candidate filing website.

Questionnaires went out in March, and candidates had about a month to respond. If a candidate in a contested race did not respond, declined to participate or submitted answers after the deadline, we note that in their entry. More than 100 individuals were invited to take part in this voter guide. About 75% responded.

To help preserve trust in the process, we are publishing answers as they were submitted. Editors reviewed responses for minor issues such as grammar and profanity. Candidates were also asked to provide basic background information, including name, age, hometown,

education, occupation and contact details. You'll also see a party label next to each candidate's name, as listed by the Secretary of State's office:

Rep — Republican
Dem — Democrat
Ind — Independent
Lib — Libertarian

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2026 Primary Election Voter Guide: The Questions

U.S. Senate

Question 1. What are your top priorities for Montana in the U.S. Senate if elected, and how would you achieve them?

Question 2. If elected, how would you protect public land access in Montana?

Question 3. About one-third of Americans say they have to cut back on groceries and utility payments in order to afford health care. As a U.S. Senator, what specific policies would you support to lower health care costs for Montanans?

Question 4. Would you have supported any of the recent War Powers resolutions that were proposed to ensure Congressional oversight?

Question 5. Immigration has been a top priority of the Trump administration. How would you evaluate the White House's handling of immigration enforcement, and would you like to see any changes?

Public Service Commission:

Question 1. What are your qualifications to serve on the Public Service Commission?

Question 2. What do you believe is the most pressing issue for the PSC over the next term?

Question 3. What role do you think the PSC should play in addressing data center proposals and the energy that powers them?

Question 4. Lawmakers have considered moving the PSC from an elected body to one whose members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Legislature. Which do you believe is the best approach?

Question 5. Infighting has been a common feature of the PSC for several years, often drawing more attention than the commission's actual work. How would you work to settle the discord?

Eastern Congressional District

Question 1. How do you plan to support agricultural producers and rural economies in your district, especially in the face of market pressures and federal regulations?

Question 2. The Montana Stockgrowers Association recently asked the federal government to expand the types of jobs allowed under the foreign agriculture workers program. Do you support finding new routes for foreign-born workers in areas of Montana where the workforce has dwindled?



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Voters wait in line to register to vote at the Flathead County elections office in Kalispell on Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022.

Question 3. Accessing health care can be particularly challenging for rural Montanans. As a U.S. Representative, what policies would you support to improve access to quality health care in rural communities?

Question 4. Data centers have become a flash point for communities concerned about resources such as water consumption and energy. How do you hope to support development while ensuring Montanans' interests are

protected?

Question 5. The eastern congressional district contains five of the seven reservations in Montana. How do you plan to engage with tribal communities to make sure their interests are represented in Washington, D.C.?

State Legislature

Question 1. What is your Number One priority if elected to the Montana Legislature?

Question 2. Ongoing spending will outpace revenues by 2027, according to legislative fiscal projections. What cuts do you see as necessary while continuing to provide essential services?

Question 3. Would you support revisiting Montana's property tax reforms from the 2025 session?

Question 4. Do you support grizzly bear delisting? Please elaborate.

Question 5. Do you support a statewide sales tax? Please elaborate.

U.S. SENATE

Charles Walking Child (Rep)



Age: 57

Location: Lewis and Clark County

Education: Bachelor's degree in Human Services, University of Great Falls (2001); additional studies at the University of Montana
Occupation: Contractor

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1. Reining in government growth, overreach, and endless spending. Federal bureaucracy and overregulation strangle Montana's economy, drive up costs, lock up our lands, and create dependency instead of opportunity. We've had enough of big government telling us how to live, farm, or run businesses. Creating good-paying jobs through responsible energy development and infrastructure. Montana has vast resources—oil, gas, coal, renewables—and we need to unleash them safely to lower energy costs, create jobs for families, and reduce foreign dependence. Add modern rail and rural broadband to connect our small towns and boost small ag/business. How I'll achieve it: Champion multiple-use on federal lands with Montana-led input, revive pipelines like Keystone XL under state standards, secure earmarks for infrastructure (roads, water, rail) with local control, and cut regulations that kill projects.

2. If elected, I would protect public land access in Montana by championing true multiple-use management on our federal lands—ensuring Montanans can hunt, fish, recreate, graze livestock, and responsibly develop resources—while cutting out-of-state interference and D.C. overreach that locks people out. Prioritize local and tribal voices in all federal land decisions. Defend and expand recreation access for hunting, fishing, hiking, and family outings. Promote responsible energy and infrastructure without extreme lockups. Cut red tape and litigation abuse.

3. As your U.S. Senator, I would fight to lower health care costs for Montanans with these targeted, practical policies—no big-government overhauls or new entitlements. Increase rural Medicare/Medicaid reimbursements to fair levels that reflect Montana's high costs and low patient volumes, preventing rural hospital and clinic closures. Expand workforce incentives like loan repayment, scholarships, and visa reforms to recruit and keep doctors, nurses, and specialists in rural and tribal

areas. Make telehealth permanent and affordable, backed by rural broadband investment, so patients get specialist care without long drives. Cut federal red tape on small providers to reduce administrative costs while keeping patient safety strong. Promote price transparency and competition to stop corporate takeovers that drive up prices.

4. Yes, I would have supported recent War Powers resolutions aimed at enforcing congressional oversight—particularly those directing the President to end unauthorized hostilities unless Congress explicitly authorizes them through a declaration of war or an AUMF. The Constitution is unambiguous: Article I, Section 8 reserves the power to declare war for Congress alone. Our Founders crafted this to prevent any single leader from entangling America in endless, costly conflicts that spill American blood and treasure without the people's representatives weighing in. George Washington's farewell warning against foreign entanglements rings as true today as ever. Montana families and our veterans have paid too high a price for endless, undeclared wars that drain resources better spent at home—on rural hospitals, borders, jobs, and veterans' care. No more blank checks for foreign adventures or elite-driven interventions.

5. Montana relies on seasonal migrant labor for harvests (cherries, hay, sugar beets), livestock work, and other tasks local workers can't fill. When fear of raids or deportations keeps workers away, crops rot, costs soar, and small producers suffer most. We've seen delays in cherry season and broader disruptions already—threatening generational ranches, tribal operations, rural jobs, and food supply. The Trump administration helped by streamlining H-2A visas (making legal guestworkers easier/cheaper) and pulling back from broad farm raids to avoid chaos. That's progress. But we need more urgency to protect Montana ag while keeping borders secure: Target enforcement at criminals and traffickers—not hardworking seasonal workers. Expand/fix H-2A and legal pathways so farms get reliable labor fast. When skilled H-2A workers are kept away on rural operations, it creates lack of workers. Our family farms feed Montana and America.



Kyle Austin (Lib)

Age: 43

Location: Billings

Education: Pharmacist

Occupation: Doctorate of Pharmacy

Contact information: www.kyleaustnmt.com



1. My first priority as United States Senator would be to eliminate wasted government spending, lower the national debt and lower tax's. This will be done by first eliminating big government and government agencies such as the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. My second priority, I would propose the United States move towards a ZERO TARRIFF policy with countries who are our allies and who purchase American products. A zero-tariff policy will lower consumer prices, increase our purchasing power, enhance efficiency through free trade, and allow competition through innovation. My third priority will be to revitalize agriculture. As a 4th Generation Farmer, we can do this by eliminating the barriers of our producers, reducing global dependence, eliminating wasteful spending and redirecting funds to improve infrastructure needs that support our farmers and ranchers. Projects such as building a fertilizer plant in eastern Montana and offering 0% financing through the USDA.

2. This is simple... keep public lands PUBLIC... our public lands are not for sale.

3. As a pharmacist for 18 years, I understand that we have bigger issues with our healthcare system than just high prescription drug prices. We can accomplish all this under my plan called healthcare 2.0. Healthcare 2.0 will create a centralized United States Healthcare corporation to oversee all healthcare in the United States, including insurance. Healthcare 2.0 will consolidate all the government healthcare programs to eliminate wasteful spending and ensure every dollar is used for healthcare, not corruption. Healthcare 2.0 will revolutionize healthcare, making healthcare more affordable and accessible than ever while at the same time improving quality.

4. Yes, I would have supported the War Power Resolutions.

5. Immigration has been out of control and it is finally time we took stronger action. We need stronger immigration policy, stronger border security, and we need a way to pay for it. The United States has been invaded by foreign religions who are internally taking over our government and instilling law such as Sharia. This needs to come to an end. I propose the United States imposes an entry fee of \$50 every time a foreign visitor comes to the United States. This will generate roughly \$3.5M per day to cover the costs of our border security and immigration. It will also reduce our national debt and lower taxes for all Americans.



Alani Bankhead (Dem)

Age: 43

Location: Helena

Education: Leadership Consultant

Occupation: BA – Latin American Studies (Penn State), BA – Crime, Law, and Justice (Penn State), MA – International Relations with



a concentration in National Security Studies, United States Air Force Air War College

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1. Accountability. Restoring Constitutional checks and balances. Congress has ceded too much authority to the Executive Branch. Hold government officials accountable for illegal acts and abuse of power via impeachment. End the war against Iran. 2. Affordability. Make housing cheaper. Get venture capital and corporations out of housing/healthcare. Raise the capital gains tax cap from \$250K to \$500K. This will allow people holding onto houses, because they don't want to pay capital gains tax more room to sell without paying taxes. This will open up inventory. Increased supply results in prices going down. Provide tax incentives for builders who build affordable houses. Medicaid for all. 3. Protecting the vulnerable. Hold Epstein class accountable for their crimes against the vulnerable. Stronger legislation to protect citizens from violence. Property taxes should be frozen if an individual is drawing social security. 4. Protect public lands. No sale of public lands. Allow corner crossing

2. No sale of public lands. Allow corner crossing.

3. Use excessive defense spending and claw back other fraudulently stolen tax dollars to provide Medicaid for All. The Pentagon spent over \$90 billion in Sep 2025 alone via the "use-lose spending" habit. Military units get a budget, and if they don't spend it every year, they lose what they didn't spend and get less the following year. We can incentivize unused monies to be returned to federal coffers to fund affordable healthcare with zero impact to the military's mission. I am a retired LtCol – I know how these budget cycles work

4. Congress must reassert its Constitutional powers. Our founders created an ingenious system, and the Legislative branch has ceded too many of those powers to the Executive branch. A healthy government is one that has appropriate oversight and accountability

5. The administration's handling of immigration has been unAmerican at best. Unless you have Native American ancestry,

we are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Every reasonable person wants border enforcement that keeps bad actors out. This administration has been abusing their authorities and inappropriately utilizing national security tools for law enforcement functions which is illegal. The ICE agents who were hired after the recent hiring push and loosened training requirements at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center would be revetted and those not meeting federal law enforcement's traditional high standards and qualifications would be removed. The country needs immigration reform too. It takes too long for legal immigrants to obtain citizenship. We must create a better and faster path.



Michael Hummert (Dem)



Age: 67
Location: Helena
Occupation: Candidate for U.S. Senate
Education: 16 years
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1. My top priorities in the U.S. Senate would be to pass legislation regulating artificial intelligence and the corporations that control the algorithms shaping public life, to advance a Balanced Budget Amendment, to pursue election reform that restores trust and integrity, and to enact comprehensive immigration reform that serves the national interest. I would work to achieve these goals by building coalitions in both the Senate and the House around issues that Americans across party lines already support. I would speak directly to citizens, lawmakers, and community leaders, encourage grassroots involvement, and keep the focus on what unites us instead of what divides us. If we want to preserve our republic for future generations, Congress must stop the endless bickering and start acting on the common ground that still exists.

2. Public land access in Montana must be protected for future generations, but protection also means safeguarding the air, water, and health of the people who depend on that land. I would oppose policies that let corporations profit while leaving taxpayers and communities with the damage. Whether the project is mining, drilling, or manufacturing, companies must be held responsible for the pollution and long-term cleanup they create. Montana has already paid too high a price in places like Butte, and we should not repeat those mistakes. Protecting public lands also

means protecting waterways, groundwater, and the air we breathe. Access matters, but so does ensuring that the land remains clean, usable, and healthy for the people of Montana.

3. Health care costs are crushing American families, and the federal government is already deeply involved in paying for care. Roughly half of Americans receive some form of government-supported health coverage, and Washington already spends enormous sums on health care. Pretending the government is not in the health care business is simply not honest. As a U.S. Senator, I would support streamlining programs, eliminating waste and corruption, and studying what works in other countries and other systems. We need to focus on lowering costs, improving outcomes, and delivering care more efficiently. I would also support reforms that emphasize long-term health through prevention, better diet, exercise, and healthier living. We are spending too much for too little value, and I would support every serious effort to lower health care costs for Montanans.

4. I would have supported Senator Kaine's effort to restore congressional oversight of military action. No president should be able to take this country into offensive hostilities without congressional authorization, except in cases of immediate self-defense. I also believe the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force signed after the September 11 attacks should be repealed. It has been stretched far beyond its original purpose and used by successive presidents to expand executive war-making power. The Constitution gives Congress a central role in matters of war, and that duty must be taken seriously. Whenever possible, Congress should be fully briefed before force is used. If there is time to consult Congress, that time should be used.

5. The White House is right to enforce immigration law, but enforcement must be lawful, disciplined, and smart. Sending large ICE operations into places like Minneapolis looked more like a show of force than a focused strategy, and that does not build public trust. The Department of Homeland Security, led by Secretary Kristi Noem, has a duty to carry out enforcement professionally and within the law. Citizens also have a duty not to physically interfere with armed federal agents. Peaceful protest is always legitimate; putting yourself in the middle of an armed operation is reckless.

I support requiring body cameras for ICE agents and clear standards for respectful treatment of everyone, including people who do not speak English. I have also written a 120-page immigration reform plan to fix the system at its core, regardless of who is president.



Reilly Neill (Dem)



Age: 52
Location: Livingston
Occupation: Elected Montana State House Representative; former newspaper owner, publisher and editor; worked in leadership inside of Montana organizing for

women's healthcare rights, culminating in the passage of CI-128, which enshrined women's healthcare in the Montana Constitution.

Education: Attended both University of Montana and Montana State University

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1. On day one, I'm ready to govern and lead. I'm the only candidate who has written legislation on a bipartisan basis and gotten it signed into law. Top priorities include addressing the for-profit healthcare model and working towards single-payer Universal Healthcare. Tariffs are hurting our farmers. We need stable markets and a farm bill that works for Montana along with mandatory COOL (Country of Origin Labeling). My proposal for an Irrigation Infrastructure

Act will build resiliency ahead of need. We must address economic pressure in our communities when it comes to housing. I'll work for veteran and low-income assistance to expand access to housing. While fighting to protect access and management of public lands, I will also work to defend Montana's water rights from data center projects that will strain our existing resources on public and working lands. Finally, we don't need to send Montana's sons and daughters to war without the full approval of Congress and the American people.

2. Montana is not for sale. We need to protect public access and prevent selloffs. We need to strengthen public land protections by fully funding land management agencies. Long-term Federal funding is critical to protecting public lands. If we do choose to develop our resources, we need responsible economic use that benefits Montana communities: recreation, grazing, and development, all with clear guardrails. I will ensure Montana voices are part of these discussions.

3. The problem with for-profit healthcare is it's for profit. This is the richest country in the world. Montanans, our veterans in rural areas, shouldn't have to drive three hours and take a day off work to get to a doctor. I've built a Universal Healthcare Act that will help stabilize and fund rural healthcare systems, expand the workforce, and bring

costs down. When I get to D.C., I will stand up for the 77,000 Montanans who don't have healthcare anymore. I will make fixing this issue a priority. Corporations have turned healthcare into for-profit businesses and no one is getting the care they need. I will fight to change this.

4. Yes. I come from a military family. I didn't serve myself but I thank our veterans for their service. We don't need to send Montana's sons and daughters to war without the full approval of Congress and the American people. Congress is not doing their jobs to hold the executive branch accountable. I will always come back to listen to my constituents in Montana. I'm here to support Montanans, not any one president. I will always come home and listen to the Montana people. On the ground, Montanans tell me right now that they want Congress to have war powers, not any individual party or person.

5. Contributing members of society who are in the process of becoming legal are not criminals. We absolutely need changes to immigration. Our immigration system has been broken for decades. This country is built on immigrants and our legacy and heritage of welcoming all to our shores. We need to have a streamlined, legal, immigration process that is efficient and effective. We don't need to defund ICE; we need to redirect ICE to deport criminals, not law-abiding individuals contributing to our communities.



Lee Calhoun (Rep)

Age: 75

Location: Whitefish

Occupation: Retired Engineer / Small Business Owner

Education: University of Pittsburgh BSME

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Photo not available

1. The cost of living in the US is too damn high! I would focus on four things in an effort to improve the cost of living.

1. Universal Healthcare – It is time to fix our broken healthcare system.

2. Roll Back of Corporate Welfare – Let the Epstein Class pay their fair share.

3. Term Limits and Mandatory Retirement Age for all branches of government – It's time to end government by the aged.

4. Energy Costs – Level the playing field and let the free market decide winners and losers.

2. Public lands are a sacred resource for all Americans. I would be hyper vigilant for any effort to sell off or degrade that resource. We should also modernize the value we all receive from that resource.

3. Nearly a dozen of Montana's rural hospitals are in danger of closing due to lack of funding caused by our broken medical system in America. Americans pay 50% more for health care than the next most expensive system in the industrialized world even though we have the worst measurable outcomes of all other industrialized countries. Let that sink in. We pay way more and get less.

The solution to this problem is actually simple, America needs a universal health care system. There are for profit and not for profit examples that work very well but no one has had the political will to buck the special interests that prevent our citizens from getting what they need and deserve in a health care system. The financial benefits to both small and large businesses of a universal health care system would also be huge. Large businesses could better compete globally and small businesses would not be strapped by health insurance costs.

4. I'm old enough to remember this is my 4th oil war and young enough to do whatever I can from within the US Senate to make it stop.

5. Everyone wants secure borders and freedom from criminals. This administration has made a mockery of their campaign promises to secure the border and remove criminals. Murdering American citizens for using their 1st and 2nd amendment rights is unacceptable and the responsible parties at all levels need to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.



Kurt Alme (Rep)

Age: 59

Location: Billings

Occupation: Former U.S. Attorney, District of Montana (twice nominated by President Trump)

Education: Custer County District High School (Miles City); University of Colorado,



Bachelor of Science in business; Harvard Law School, law degree.

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1. I'm running to make life more affordable, make our communities safer, and protect our way of life. And I have the experience to get it done.

I'm a budget and tax hawk. I know how to balance a budget and cut taxes to put money back into the pockets of Montanans to make life more affordable. As Revenue Director, I led the largest income tax rate reduction in state history. As Budget Director, we balanced the budget, delivered one of Montana's largest tax cuts, and

helped make Montana debt-free.

As U.S. Attorney, twice nominated by President Trump, I know what it takes to make our communities safer. Under my leadership last year, we went after violent criminals and drug traffickers, and criminal prosecutions hit a 20-year high. I will work with President Trump again to secure our border, dismantle the cartels, and protect our communities.

Finally, I will protect our way of life by protecting our Second Amendment rights, keeping boys out of girls' sports and securing our elections.

2. Public lands are part of our way of life. We must keep them in public hands and protect Montanans' right to hike, hunt, fish, and recreate. I've lived all across our state – from Great Falls to Dillon, Victor, Helena, Miles City, and Billings. Some of my best memories were spent with my family – as a son and a dad – on our public lands. This way of life is worth protecting.

We must ensure Montanans have access to the public lands we've enjoyed for generations and find commonsense ways to expand public lands access, while protecting private property rights. Our kids and grandkids deserve the same way of life that we enjoy. We also have a duty to manage federal lands to benefit Montanans. Local Montanans must be heard, and their input must drive decisions on public lands policies. As Senator, I will fight back against federal overreach and radical activist groups who lock up public lands, impede responsible land management, and destroy businesses and jobs.

3. Montanans still feel the impacts of President Biden's runaway spending and unchecked inflation. Deficit spending causes higher prices. The best way to make life more affordable is to rein in spending and keep taxes low to put money back in Montanans' pockets. We need fiscal responsibility in Washington.

To lower health care costs and increase access to quality care, we need to take a patient-centered approach that empowers consumers, expands choice, and boosts competition. Price transparency will allow Montanans to shop when considering medical care, with prices posted for consumers to see. Also, expanded opportunities for self-employed individuals and small businesses to band together to receive affordable coverage with protections for preexisting conditions are critical. In addition, tens of billions of dollars are lost to health care fraud each year. Waste, fraud, and abuse must be stopped to lower costs. Health care is too expensive. I'm ready to deliver solutions as Senator.

4. As Senator, I'll work to ensure our Commander-in-Chief has the tools needed to protect Americans – while making sure

Congress does its job and Montanans' voices are heard. The Constitution is clear: Congress holds the power to declare war. Both parties have let that responsibility slide for decades. Congress needs to assert that power.

But the President must have the ability to act quickly to protect Americans. Tying our Commander-in-Chief and troops' hands behind their backs, like recent proposals in the Senate would have done, is dangerous. Especially when the world's largest state sponsor of terror is seeking nuclear weapons. As your Senator, I'll insist Congress exercise its constitutional war-making authority to keep our sons and daughters out of forever wars, while ensuring the President has sufficient flexibility to defend us.

5. Montanans firmly rejected President Biden's open-borders policies and elected President Trump to secure the border. And he has delivered.

President Trump nominated me as U.S. Attorney in his first term and again in his second, because I aggressively protected our communities from deadly drugs, cartels, and criminal organizations invading our country and killing Americans. Under my leadership, we hit a 20-year high for criminal prosecutions, targeting violent criminals and drug traffickers to keep our communities safe.

We must continue to secure the border, support law enforcement, prioritize the prosecution of violent criminals, and investigate drug trafficking organizations all the way up to the cartels – so we can tear them out by their roots. We must also focus on prevention and treatment to shrink the market for drug trafficking and restore our citizens to health. I look forward to working with President Trump again to secure our borders and make our communities safer.



Seth Bodnar (Ind)

Age: 47

Location: Missoula

Occupation: Former Green Beret, Businessman and Former President of the University of Montana

Education: I graduated from West Point with a degree in economics.



Afterwards, I was honored to receive the Rhodes and Truman Scholarship and I graduated from Oxford with two degrees, one in economics, the other in comparative social policy.

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1. Revive the American Dream: Housing is

out of reach, childcare breaks the budget, and both parties offer culture-war theater while costs keep climbing. We need to expand housing supply by cutting federal red tape and zoning barriers that drive up construction costs and lock Montanans out of ownership. I will support tax incentives for workforce housing development in small-town Montana communities and I'll work to lower childcare costs by expanding access to tax credits and eliminating regulatory burdens on small providers.

We need substantive reform in Washington. Party bosses use our institutions to protect themselves while Montanans get left behind. I support a ban on Members of Congress trading stocks. I support financial transparency requirements and conflict-of-interest rules for members of Congress. I support nonpartisan redistricting to end gerrymandering to restore competitive elections that serve voters. I believe we need term limits and age limits on Members of Congress.

2. Public lands are the foundation of Montana's way of life, hunting and fishing heritage, and the multibillion dollar outdoor economy. I oppose any sale or transfer of federal public lands – in Montana or any other state. Public lands belong in public hands. I will also support federal funding for land management agencies- the Forest Service, BLM, and Fish & Wildlife Service so they have the staff and resources to manage the lands they're responsible for. I am deeply opposed to the recent announcement that the Forest Service will close regional offices and 57 research facilities, including two in Montana. These closures, at the orders of bureaucrats in Washington, will make our public lands less secure, impacting the health of our forests especially as wildfires now happen all year round. The bottom line is that when it comes to our public lands, Washington needs to take its orders from the Montanans that live, work, hunt, fish, and recreate on our public lands, not the other way around.

3. The way Washington operates makes no sense. While the government is shut down, Americans are waiting in long lines, and the nation is at war, Congress goes on vacation. Tariffs drive up prices for our businesses, farmers, ranchers, and those costs show up in the grocery store. Diesel is now over \$5/gallon making everything more expensive for Montanans. Last year's budget bill will kick tens of thousands of Montanans off their health care and put rural health facilities at risk – so even when folks can afford care, they sometimes have to drive to or more hours to get it. When I get to Washington, my priority will be, and will always be Montana. We need policies that not only make sense, but make life easier,

not harder for working men and women in our state

4. As someone who served this nation in combat, I know firsthand the gravity of sending America's sons and daughters to war. Yes, I would support a War Powers resolution because it is the Constitutional responsibility of Congress to declare war, and Congress needs to do its job to prevent the brave members of our military from being fighting in another forever war in the Middle East. Congress is failing in its Constitutional responsibilities and has ceded far too much power to the executive branch. Neither party demonstrated leadership in the lead up to the war with Iran; instead waiting until our forces were already engaged to declare their support or opposition. I'm running as an Independent because our political system has been broken by party elites who care more about trading power back and forth than doing what's right for Montana, the American people, and most importantly, our men and women in uniform.

5. Both parties have failed on immigration enforcement over the last few decades. I support strong, consistent border security –both at the southern and northern border – with the resources, personnel, and technology to get the job done. We can do this while also protecting Americans' Constitutional rights.



Christopher Kehoe (Dem)



Age: 40
Location: Missoula
Occupation: Theatre Artist and Arts Administrator
Education: Currently earning a second MFA from University of Montana in Missoula
Contact information: www.christopherkehoe.com

1. 1. Protecting communities from private AI industry land acquisition. 2. Improving mental and physical health outcomes. 3. Making political discourse healthy again.

Very large, very powerful data companies are practically salivating over using Montana land to house data centers. Communities need to have a controlling seat at this table. The economic and environmental costs of data center construction and maintenance (which are astronomical) need to be disclosed to the public, and any data center built needs to continually serve the community in real, material ways. Reforming Section 230 and gutting Citizens United would do wonders for our collective mental health. Every 2 years, we're inundated with a torrent of awful political advertising, designed to

keep us terrified and paranoid. By both reforming Section 230 (holding social media accountable for content) and ending Citizens United (stopping out-of-state political spending), we can make our relationship to politics healthy again.

2. Montana land is not for sale, full stop. I would vote against any legislation that would see the federal government sell public land to private industry or to a foreign country. If the State of Montana wants any public land sold, then it must be done with the full lock-step support of the county and city (and reservation, if applicable) the land resides in. Once public land is gone, it's gone forever, so any sale of public land needs every possible stakeholder to freely agree to the terms of sale.

3. I'm a big supporter of universal health care. Even a modest policy that covers basic services would exert a huge influence in overall health care costs, making preventative health care more accessible to the average American and letting costs be handled by our tax code (I'd also look to increase both the number of tax brackets and how they scale at higher incomes). Short of the above, I would reimplement (if not expand) the health care subsidies and SNAP benefits that the so-called Big, Beautiful Bill eliminated.

4. Not only do I support all the recent War Powers resolutions, I would look to amend the 1973 resolution from 30 days down to 7. War has become unimaginably faster, more lethal, and more complicated than it was in 1973, so we need to modernize this oversight to match our modern reality. The violation of the War Powers Resolution should be an immediate impeachable offense—what else could put so many American lives in needless danger than a capricious, ego-driven war that Congress has not approved?

5. Absolutely heinous. ICE's deployment and tactics have been nothing short of barbaric, and this administration literally has blood on its hands. It is imperative that ICE be re-scoped to be an administrative agency exclusively, which coordinates with local law enforcement to correct any immigration infractions. Local law enforcement knows the communities they serve best, and can advocate for any lapsed-status immigrants who are not an immediate danger to the community. "Illegal" immigrants are, first and foremost, the victims of an opaque, near-impossible naturalization process—not nefarious individuals looking to game a system. If Christ implores us to welcome the stranger, then ICE is about as non-Christian of an agency as one can imagine.



**FOR PUBLIC SERVICE
 COMMISSION DISTRICT 1**

Note: One candidate running for Public Service Commission, Angeline Cheek (Dem), did not participate in the questionnaire.



Jeremy Trebas (Rep)



Age: 41
Location: Great Falls
Occupation: Accountant
Education: MSU Bozeman – Business / Accounting
Contact information: www.jeremytrebas.com

1. CPA, current legislator (8 years experience at end of term), studied Montana energy issues for years

2. Generation and Distribution capacity – especially as data centers high demand for electricity look to locate in Montana.

3. I think the PSC should have a cooperative relationship with the Legislature and work with policymakers to protect ratepayers through changes in law.

4. I strongly think electing the PSC is the best approach. I don't think voters want more power centralized into Helena.

5. I'm low drama and all about the business of making sure the rates set are balanced between being affordable and providing appropriate ROI for companies.



Jeff Pattison (Rep)



Age: 66
Location: Glasgow
Occupation: Farm/rancher
Education: Glasgow HS, NMC Havre, Mother Nature, Montana legislator, advocacy boards.
Contact information: pattison.jeff@gmail.com, pattisonformontana.com, FB Pattison for public service commissioner, 406-263-5000

1. I'm not a career politician—I'm a Montana advocate who understands energy, listens to people, and will fight to keep power reliable, affordable, and in the hands of the people. I've attended hearings, participated via zoom, written letters, attended learning events and personally meet with commissioners to better understand the issues. Rate increases should never be automatic. Utilities have to prove they're necessary and justified. My job on the PSC would be to make sure Montana ratepayers get reliable service at the lowest reasonable cost.

2. I'd bet data centers will become more "in the headlines" and ferreting out the truth, asking hard questions and demanding real answers

3. Large industrial users like data centers must cover the infrastructure costs they require so Montana families and small businesses aren't left paying the bill. As a farmer and rancher, I also believe we must be good stewards of resources like electricity and water. Development is welcome – but ratepayers come first.

4. I'm a firm believer in our first amendment and the right to elect who we want to represent us.

5. Disagreement is healthy—dysfunction isn't. My focus will be on doing the job professionally and keeping the PSC focused on what matters: reliable, affordable power for Montana families. Montanans deserve a Public Service Commission that works as hard as they do. As a farmer and rancher, I've learned you don't always agree, but you still have to sit down, solve problems, and get the work done.



FOR PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION DISTRICT 5

Annie Bukacek (Rep)



Age: 68

Location: I am registered to vote in Helena, and travel back and forth from Kalispell and Helena.

Occupation: Public Service Commissioner and physician

Education: doctorate

Contact information:

bukacek4PSC.com

1. I am in my fourth year of serving as Public Service Commissioner honestly, conscientiously, and effectively. I understand the responsibilities, policies, and procedures and work well with the excellent PSC staff. I made campaign promises in 2022 and I kept them... including sharing extensive research findings with the public. To do the commissioner job properly, a person must have an intense work ethic, be a good listener, do independent research and skillfully apply analytic tools to large volumes of complex information in order to draw reasoned conclusions and solve problems. My education level is doctorate. Decades of being a medical doctor and grassroots advocate have taught me those needed skills. I have fine-tuned those skills and applied them to every case that comes

before us at the PSC. Right now, more than ever, the public needs Public Service Commissioners who go above and beyond the call of duty... and that is me.

2. Next term, the focus will be planning ahead for Montana's growing energy needs within an aging power grid. Maintaining resource adequacy remains the biggest issue because of the soaring demand for power and water. The Public Service Commission has a role in ensuring the future needs are met and at the best possible cost, based on balancing affordability and reliability. We do this through expert quality decision making based on careful analysis of complex information presented to us. Analysis includes careful scrutiny of the information we collect from the utility companies we regulate.

3. The PSC currently has three open dockets pertaining to data centers. Because they are open dockets, there is little I can rightfully say about them. The commission's task is to keep an open mind, read pre-hearing testimony, ask questions during the hearing that make for a robust evidentiary record, review the evidence, and make a decision. The purpose of this process is to fulfill the goal of the PSC of ensuring access to affordable, reliable, service from the utilities it regulates.

4. There has never been a time in history more important than right now, for PSC Commissioners to be directly answerable to the citizens of Montana who elect them. I have experienced the problems firsthand with elected commissioners, and there would be a different set of problems if the commissioners were all appointed. PSC leadership has been working on a strategic plan since 2021 to mitigate some of the problems with commissioners being elected. Many good improvements have been made and there is more work to do. Legislators have the jurisdiction to decide if the PSC is to be elected, appointed, or a hybrid of elected and appointed.

5. PSC leadership has been working on a strategic plan since 2021, starting two years before I began my term. Part of the strategic plan has been the development of an internal policy manual. Our policy manual covers many topics, including policies and procedures for dealing effectively with human behavior. The PSC is a great place to work in part because of the high quality of the majority of the people who work there. Many good improvements have been made at the PSC through strategic planning, and there is more work to do. I am pleased to be part of the process to improve the performance and reputation of the PSC.



Kevin Hamm (Dem)



Age: 53

Location: East Helena

Occupation: IT Consulting

Education: Some College

Contact information:

kevinhamm.com,
campaign@kevinhamm.com, 406-417-0070

1. My family has been in the telecom industry since the Bell System's early days, influencing my understanding of regulated services and captive rate payers. I was a partner and later CEO of a small local internet company, navigating regulations for over five years. My experience includes phone service, fiber internet, and electrical services, engaging with these systems throughout my life. My tech journey began early, training local architects on AutoCAD. I'm driven by curiosity about system interconnections and use my skills to analyze and optimize processes. Growing up in Montana instilled a strong commitment to community investment, viewing neighbors and towns as vital resources. I've served on boards like Queen City Ballet and Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies. I also founded the Happiness & Joy Foundation, a 501©3 nonprofit that generates significant revenue for Helena annually through the Montana Pride celebration, which I've directed for over a decade.

2. Making sure that the PSC actually does the job it's supposed to do. Electricity rates have surged nearly 40% in four years, with costs tripling since deregulation, despite flat residential demand. This is due to more efficient devices requiring no more electricity than our vastly smaller residential population in 1996. Northwestern's rate increases, approved by the GOP, continue to fall on residential customers but our demand is still flat. Additionally, residential customers pay up to twice as much per kW as industrial or commercial customers, a pricing disparity with no justification. A kilowatt should cost the same for everyone, and this abusive pricing where individuals and families subsidize the costs for industry is not only wrong, it's why the PSC was put in place.

It doesn't have to continue this way, just vote responsibly.

3. Datacenters, as currently planned, are excessively harmful to their locations and should be halted. The PSC has the power to ensure that infrastructure upgrades needed for these facilities are funded by the datacenter owners, not Montanans. The rise in electricity demand should always be directed to the customers creating it, rather than

burdening residential users. While water use and pollution are not directly regulated by the PSC, we can still initiate discussions on what benefits Montanans. Accepting AI companies' assurances without scrutiny is unacceptable. Montana's history shows that wealthy interests often deceive to exploit the state—from destructive mines to land acquisitions that restrict public access. These greedy elites profit from Montana's beauty while leaving its residents to bear the costs. This must end, and the PSC can lead the charge.

4. The only thing lawmakers should be considering with the PSC is going back to regulatory statutes that were removed in 1996. That change was done with lies and deception presented to the legislature and to the governor and if you ask any of them they all will tell you it was a mistake and shouldn't've happened. Moving the PSC to be an appointed position just makes the commissioners kowtow to the governor and that's not what the commission is supposed to do either. The Public Service Commission should be non-partisan and should be working for the people of Montana. Not the companies, not the out-of-state interests, the people of Montana. Period.

It's not hard to do right by the people of Montana: rates need to be lowered, infrastructure needs to be invested in, and the C-Suite of NWE doesn't need to make millions of dollars each, ever, and that should change. Vote for someone willing to put in the work to get there. It's not impossible, it's just going to take backbone and time.

5. This is a job, and an incredibly impactful one at that. What's amazing to me is that the current crop of commissioners have continued this infighting because none of them can even stand to be in the same room unless it's required. Having the ability to talk to people who fundamentally disagree with you isn't that hard, I've done it my entire life.

And yes, if I'm the only progressive on the commission it's going to be contentious in how we do our jobs, but that doesn't mean it's disrespectful or involves backstabbing and other nonsense. I know full well that the continuing commissioners know me and while they wouldn't choose me, they also know that if needs be they can talk to me and we can build consensus. It's not a kingdom, it's a commission, and that job is worth doing and doing well, no matter what anyone thinks of each other personally.

I don't have to grab a beer with you to listen and work with you. It's just not that hard.

**Joe Dooling (Rep)**

Age: 50
Location: North Helena Valley
Occupation: Farmer/Rancher
Education: MSU ad business/economics
Contact information: 406-431-3510, joe.dooling@outlook.com

1. My qualifications come from a lifetime of working the land, running a business, and serving my community – exactly the kind of real-world experience that shapes what Montana ratepayers actually need from their PSC. I am a third-generation Montanan, a farmer and rancher in the Helena Valley. Running an agricultural operation means managing costs, navigating energy and water infrastructure, and making hard financial decisions without a safety net. I know what utility bills mean to a family budget because I live it every month. Beyond the farm, I have a record of public service and leadership. I served as Chairman of the Lewis and Clark County Republican Party, sat on the Lewis and Clark County Fairgrounds Board, and was a member of

the Montana Stockgrowers Association. I was also appointed by President Trump to the Farm Service Agency Committee – a federal appointment that required demonstrated trustworthiness and sound judgment.

2. Every month, ratepayers open their bills and wonder why they're paying more for the same service – or less reliable service than before. The PSC exists to stop that from happening, and right now it isn't doing its job well enough. Rate cases have become exercises in rubber-stamping utility requests rather than rigorous scrutiny on behalf of the people paying the bills. That has to change. Every proposed rate increase must be examined as if the money is coming out of your own pocket – because for Montana families, it is. Closely connected to rising costs is the threat to grid reliability. Montana winters are not a theoretical problem. When temperatures drop to twenty below zero, families need power that works. The PSC must defend baseload generation – coal, hydro, and advanced nuclear – against policies that sacrifice reliability on the altar of ideology. An affordable rate means nothing if the lights go out.

3. Data centers present a genuine challenge for Montana ratepayers, and the PSC needs to approach them with clear eyes and a firm commitment to consumer

protection. Large industrial energy users like data centers can place enormous new demands on the grid. If utilities use those demands to justify infrastructure upgrades or rate base expansions that ultimately get passed on to residential and small business ratepayers, the PSC must say no. The people heating their homes in January should not be subsidizing the energy appetites of technology companies that chose Montana for its cheap power. At the same time, the PSC should not be reflexively hostile to economic development. New industrial load, if properly structured, can sometimes improve system economics for all ratepayers. The question the PSC must ask in every case is simple: does this deal benefit Montana ratepayers, or does it just benefit the utility and the data center operator?

4. Elected. Without question. The PSC makes decisions that affect every Montana household's monthly expenses. When a commissioner votes to approve a rate increase, that vote reaches into the budgets of families, farmers, ranchers, and small businesses across the state. The people bearing those costs deserve the final say in who makes those decisions. Appointment systems breed insulation. When commissioners are chosen by a governor and confirmed by a legislature, they become accountable to those

institutions – not to the ratepayers they are supposed to protect. The distance between a commissioner and an ordinary Montanan grows wider, and the opportunities for political and corporate influence to fill that gap grow accordingly. Montana has a long tradition of keeping important decisions close to the people they affect. The PSC should stay elected.

5. The discord at the PSC is a symptom of a deeper problem: commissioners who have lost sight of who they work for. When the primary job is protecting ratepayers, there is less room for turf wars, personality conflicts, and procedural maneuvering. People who are focused on doing the actual work don't have time for political knife-fighting. The first step toward a functional commission is electing people who understand that their job is to serve Montana families – not to accumulate institutional power or settle personal scores.

**David Sanders (Rep)**

Age: 66
Location: Helena
Occupation: Chief of Staff, Office of the Montana State Auditor
Education: College of William and Mary BA in Economics and Philosophy,

Washington is Broke. We Need Structural Reform to Survive.

Montana voters deserve an honest conversation about what this race is really about.

This isn't a city council seat. It's not the state legislature. It's the United States Senate.

And yet, much of this primary conversation is focused on smaller, local-level concerns or avoids the biggest issue entirely: a federal government that is \$39 trillion in debt and heading in the wrong direction.

We are facing decisions in the next few years that will define the future of this country – rising national debt, the impending 2034 depletion of the Social Security trust fund, and a government that continues to spend without a plan to stabilize itself.

These are not abstract problems. They affect every working family, every paycheck, and every future generation.

Before you vote, take the time to review all four candidates' websites. Look at their plans. Ask yourself who is actually addressing the long-term future of your children – and who is not. And just as importantly, consider who is best prepared to represent Montana Democrats in the general election.

We can continue down the same path and accept the consequences – or we can choose a different direction.

I'm running because ignoring these realities is no longer an option.

I support a Balanced Budget Amendment to restore fiscal discipline. I support term limits and age limits to bring accountability back to Washington. I support campaign finance reform and a Voter Protection Amendment to reduce concentrated influence and return power to the people. I also support hard federal oversight to control the billionaire

corporatists developing AI before they finish controlling us.

I've also developed a comprehensive immigration proposal because border security and economic stability are directly connected.

This campaign is not about managing symptoms. It's about fixing the system.

Democrats can't fix this alone. Republicans can't fix it alone either. Too often, we get

pulled into divisions that keep us from addressing the problems we all know are there.

It is time for hard accountability.

**✓ VOTE****MICHAEL HUMMERT FOR U.S. SENATE**

Paid for by Michael Hummert for United States Senate.



minor in Government; Willamette University Graduate Studies in Management
Contact information: www.SandersforMontana.com, 406-475-5101

1. I served as the Executive Director of the Montana Public Service Commission where I won a Governor's Award for Excellence in Performance in 2024. I currently serve as the Chief of Staff for the Office of the Montana State Auditor and Commissioner of Securities and Insurance. I have extensive experience successfully managing Montana regulatory agencies and federal, state and local government agencies. Agencies I have led have received the "Innovations in Government" award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and became the first government organizations to achieve international quality assurance recognition under the ISO 9001 quality assurance standard.

2. Restoring the PSC's credibility as a regulatory body focused on its mission rather than on conflict among the Commissioners. I also believe the PSC must place a greater emphasis on protecting Montana residential ratepayers who are facing an affordability crisis.

3. The PSC has an important regulatory role in ensuring that residential ratepayers are not forced to shoulder the financial burden of data center proposals which place extraordinary demands on our power grid. As President Trump said in his most recent State of the Union Address, "ratepayer protection pledges must be used to prevent residential ratepayers from having to pay for the data centers of private, for-profit tech companies."

4. I have seen the PSC function well as an elected body and we have all seen it devolve into its current state of disrepair over the last year due to personal animosities and ambitions. I could support some meaningful structural reforms to the PSC, but changing from an elected body to an appointed one is no guarantee of future success. I think that there should be some level of qualifications for candidates for the PSC as we have for other state offices.

5. I was able to facilitate positive, production working relationships at the PSC when I was the Executive Director as recently as 2024. Focusing governmental organizations on their core missions and goals is my professional specialty and something for which I have a special skill set. As a Commissioner, I am confident that I can work with my colleagues to return the PSC to its core mission in relatively short order.



Eastern Congressional District

Note: One candidate for Eastern Congressional District, Troy Downing (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.

Brian J. Miller (Dem)



Age: 54
Location: Helena
Education: Law Degree-University of Montana (2007). Philosophy, B.A.-Emory University (1995)
Occupation: Attorney in the practice of civil litigation in state and federal courts

throughout Montana
Contact information: www.miller4congress.com, brian@miller4congress.com; Facebook (Brian Miller), X (bjmiller1972), TikTok (@brianmiller904), and LinkedIn (Brian Miller)

1. First, we must end the War in Iran immediately. This is a 911 situation. We are seeing several extremely damaging effects from this unconstitutional and criminal war on Montana Ag. These effects include, not are not limited to: skyrocketing diesel prices, skyrocketing fertilizer prices, and a dangerous contraction of international trade. In order to support our Montana agricultural community, I will not vote for one penny of funding for the Department of War until all of our military assets are out of the Middle East. Beyond that, we need to immediately repeal the Canadian tariffs. I have spoken to farmers and ranchers in Montana who have had trade deals destroyed because of these Canadian tariffs. If elected, one of the first things I will do is take a trade delegation of Montana farmers and ranchers to Canada to try to mend fences with our neighbors to the North and apologize for the disrespect that has been shown to them by Trump. We need Canada and they need us.

2. If the Stockgrowers Association is serious about protecting ranchers, they need to do a lot better than that. If they are serious, and not just playing politics, they will call for an immediate end to Trump's mass deportation policy and call on Congress to pass a 21st century immigration reform bill. No one in their right mind thinks that any immigrant from anywhere is going to come to America when they could be thrown in detention and hurt. Trump caused this and no one in Montana has been saying anything about it; now it's at a crisis level. I am disappointed in the failure of leaders in Montana's agricultural community to speak out against Trump's mass deportation policy when they all know good and well that

immigrant labor is vital to the functioning of our Montana agricultural economy. If elected, I will do everything I can to change that. The Montana Stockgrowers need to step up quick on this before ranching is dead in Montana. Half measures will not suffice.

3. There are two things which are making it impossible for us to have a good healthcare system in America: greed and stupidity. We must switch to a non-profit based model for healthcare. We want doctors, nurses, and providers to make good money, and reduce the amount that hospital CEOs and administrators are making, so more money is available for patient care. The issues specifically with rural providers can be addressed in part with using better technologies that will allow patients to monitor their health at home with the assistance of professionals via tele-health; so this is going to require us to have better internet accessibility in rural Montana. We can also maximize the use of diagnostic AI to provide care to people without always having them visit clinics. But I would also like to see us develop facilities throughout our rural communities based on data-driven analysis which shows the kinds of procedures and services that these communities really need for good patient care.

4. AI holds the promise of great increases in economic productivity for the American economy, but we have to find a measured way to build data capacity. First, data centers cannot have negative impacts on the environment in which they operate. The tech companies may not like it, but they are going to have to build in a way that costs them more, but is sustainable. Second, consumer rates cannot be increased by data centers. Again, the tech billionaires may not like it, but they are going to pay higher rates so those costs don't get passed on to us. Third, local control is critical, and if a community doesn't want a data center, that's the end of the story. Fourth, I want to see these big companies who build data centers taxed appropriately to pay their share and that money used to benefit our state. If we do this right, it could be a win for the people since our colder climate is the type of environment that is conducive to these data centers; but we have to be smart about it.

5. We have a sad and tragic history when it comes to tribal-federal relations; it is a history filled with hatred, genocidal policies, and a lack of respect. In order to build trust, we must respect tribal sovereignty. Federal representatives must take time to listen to the perspective of the tribal nations and understand what is important to them and how they see the world. The federal government should be humble about this.

What I would like to see are federal-tribal plans that are built from the ground up, directed by the tribes, and supported by the federal government. Ultimately, tribes want to be completely and totally self-sufficient, and that should be the goal, working in partnership; but it will take some time to get there and we have to be patient. The tribes have many brilliant, capable and professional leaders; they know what needs to be done to move their communities forward in a way that is consistent with their cultural, spiritual, and environmental viewpoints.



Sam Lux (Dem)



Age: 30
Location: Great Falls
Education: Early high school graduate with vet tech, software development, and farrier vocational training
Occupation: Farrier

Contact information: www.luxformontana.com, lux@luxformontana.com, 406-866-8018, All Social Media's: luxformontana

1. I will establish a federally maintained cost-of-living standard through the BLS, and use it to index the federal minimum wage with automatic annual adjustments. Second, I will roll back tariffs, strengthen international trade, pass mCOOL, secure Right to Repair, and abolish the estate tax on family-owned farms. I will continue introducing single-issue legislation to bypass gridlock and have already secured national support to move these policies forward on day one. Third, I will stand with workers and collaborate directly with union locals to ensure all infrastructure and economic development projects are built worker-first, with strong protections, fair wages, and real job opportunities. Fourth, I will introduce a rural infrastructure bill to expand access to primary and mental healthcare, vocational training, and job placement. I will expand broadband access and fund critical projects like the Milk River Project to restore the foundation rural communities depend on

2. Absolutely. It is imperative that we address the workforce shortage in our agricultural sector, and I support all efforts to do so.

3. I support universal healthcare, specifically a single payer system, and I will work to implement one that guarantees coverage for every American, with the freedom to opt out. Healthcare is not a luxury, it is a fundamental human right. Right now, rural Montanans face some of the worst barriers to care, from hospital closures to long travel distances. That

system is broken, and I will not accept it. My focus is on delivering real results: full coverage without deductibles or network restrictions, the ability to negotiate drug prices, and a serious expansion of rural healthcare so communities like ours are not left in medical deserts. Care should be between you and your doctor, no one else. I will also expand and strengthen Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans' healthcare while we transition, because people need relief now.

4. Right now, data centers threaten our communities through massive water use, rising electricity costs, and environmental damage, while corporations take tax breaks and leave locals with the consequences. I will not allow this to become the status quo in Montana. Data centers are coming. The question is whether we make them respect our resources and serve Montanans, or allow Montanans to be exploited. First, I will mandate closed-loop water systems for all data centers, no exceptions. New open-loop systems will be banned, and existing ones must transition and fund cleanup. Second, I will end citizen-funded subsidies. Companies must build at least 115% of their own energy capacity so Montanans are not paying higher power bills. Third, I will introduce the Automated Infrastructure Tax Act to ensure these facilities pay back into local infrastructure, education, and workforce development.

5. Montana's tribal nations deserve real representation that respects sovereignty and delivers results. MT-02 is home to the majority of our tribal nations, yet too often they have been treated as an afterthought. That is unacceptable. Since the start of my campaign, I have driven over 2,800 miles visiting tribal communities. Those were not campaign stops, they were listening sessions. I believe no one understands what a community needs better than the people who live there. My job is to listen, partner with tribal governments, and deliver what they are asking for. I will support legislation to expand tribal healthcare, job training, and mental health services, improve access to VA care for Native veterans, and ensure federal policy respects sovereignty and tells the truth about our shared history.



Patrick McCracken (Lib)



Age: 48
Location: Columbia Falls
Education: Montana State University, Bachelor of Science, Earth Sciences
Occupation: Precious Metals & Rare Coin brokerage
Contact information:

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THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

The Montana State Capitol in Helena, Mont.

1. The same squeeze hollowing out the American middle class is hollowing out Montana agriculture. The generations before us didn't build this state just so our way of life could be lost to monopolies who control both sides of the market. Farmers and ranchers are surrounded by price-fixing corporate monopolies. When the middle breaks, a tech billionaire waits to buy the land. Congress can fix this. I will bring, support, sponsor, and co-sponsor:

- COOL so consumers can choose American product.
- Cash trade mandates for real price discovery.
- The PRIME Act to open local Montana markets without the Big Four bottleneck.
- Strong enforcement of the Packers & Stockyards Act.

Congress needs to open the market! Consumers want choice and producers can fulfill that directly. If we want Montana Agriculture to thrive, their Rep needs to do more than pose for pictures.

2. Wages are too low to start a family and land prices are too high to start a farm. The work won't wait. If expanding the foreign ag worker program keeps our farms and ranches operating, I'll support it. But be honest: this is a symptom, not a solution. When four meatpackers control the market and set the price, rancher margins collapse. When margins collapse, producers can't pay wages that keep Montanans home. When the kids leave, you need workers from somewhere else. Every labor shortage in agriculture traces back to the same consolidation and monopoly pricing that has hollowed out rural economies for forty years. Fix the underlying economics – restore competitive

markets, enforce antitrust law, and pass COOL so Montana product commands a premium – and operations can pay wages that attract Montana workers and keep the next generation on the land. Until then, the Stockgrowers are right, the work needs to get done. Unlike the floor of the House, where nothing gets done at all.

3. Healthcare is a problem nationwide, but it's brutal here. Nine Montana counties have no doctor at all. This isn't a market failure – there is no market. Government capped the supply of doctors, insurance giants and hospital systems control access, and Washington banned Medicare from negotiating drug prices for decades. Then they act shocked when rural hospitals close and doctors won't come here. I'll protect Medicaid expansion. It's the only thing keeping many rural Montana hospitals open right now, and I won't let ideology close a hospital while people still need it. But protection isn't a plan. Real access means opening the market: make telehealth permanent; let doctors bill patients directly and cut the middleman; price transparency on every bill; slash licensing barriers so providers can practice where they're needed; simplify loan forgiveness.

Get government out of the way and let doctors be doctors. Only then will Montana kids who want to practice medicine come home.

4. I do not support data centers in Montana. That doesn't mean they won't come. They will. When they do, they should pay full market rates. The AI and tech industry is circling our cheap energy, cold water, and captive monopoly utility like wolves on a newborn elk calf. The resource war is here!

Northwestern Energy (NWE) is negotiating deals that would more than double our electricity demand. After the Montana Power fiasco, NWE now earns a guaranteed rate of return on every new asset they build. The more power they sell to data centers, the bigger their guaranteed profits. Contracts are sealed. Water commitments are secret. The Public Service Commission says you don't get to see the terms. A monopoly you have no choice but to pay is reshaping Montana's grid, water, and cost of living for a generation – while the regulators hide the details. That's not regulation. That's collaboration. Montana is not Silicon Valley. Our water, our power, and our land belong to Montanans first.

5. I'll start by asking Jonathan Windy Boy when I see him and we can go from there. I'm a white guy. I don't pretend to understand the lived experience on the reservation. But I have my own lived experience under the same sky. I know what keeping your word looks like, and right now treaty obligations are being quietly lumped in with unrelated programs so they can be cut. That's not an accident.

Tribes face every problem we all face – housing, healthcare, crime, jobs – only worse. Five reservations in MT-02. Real people, real problems, and nobody in Washington doing a damn thing about it. We spend billions defending ancient land claims on the other side of the world while the Little Shell can't get the 200 acres it's owed. Native women are murdered at ten times the national average. Killers walk free in the tribal-state-federal jurisdictional mess. Cartels exploit those same gaps. Tribal sovereignty is treaty law. I won't play along with anyone trying to break it.



Dr. Michael D. Eisenhauer Colonel (Retired), Medical Corps, United States Army (Ind)



Age: 62
Location: Great Falls
Education:
 Undergraduate: University of Nebraska-Lincoln;
 BS-Life Sciences, BA-Chemistry, Minor-Music,
 1982-1986 Medical School
 (Doctor of Medicine –

MD): Georgetown University School of Medicine, Washington, D.C., 1986-1990. Masters of Business Administration (MBA) with Certificate in Healthcare Administration: University of Texas-Dallas, Richardson, TX, 2014-2015. Post-Graduate Medical Training: i. Residency: Internal Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C., 1990-1993. ii. Fellowship: Cardiovascular Medicine, Madigan Army Medical Center, Fort Lewis/

Tacoma, WA, 1994-1997. iii. Fellowship: Interventional Cardiology, St. Louis University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO, 1999-2000.

Occupation: Doctor of Medicine; Cardiovascular Medicine (Board Certified, 1997 to present), and Interventional Cardiology (Board Certified, 2000 to present). Military Service Veteran; Retired Medical Corps Officer, with 24+ years length of Active-Duty Service, United States Army. Father; My son is a Mechanical and Structural Engineer, and lives and works in Great Falls.

Contact information: website: www.eisenhauerforcongress.com, info@eisenhauerforcongress.com, 406-868-2277, 1720 10th Ave S, Ste 4, PMB #416, Great Falls, MT 59405

1. Family farms and ranches underpin our regional economy, national security, and way of life in Montana. Without positive action, more farmers and ranchers will go bankrupt or simply stop producing (at a loss). Our young people will not go into agriculture; it will take decades to repair our rural economies.

Problems:

- Input costs; the War in Iran has only compounded cost increases in both fuel and fertilizer.

- Output prices are down.

- Tariffs.

- Declining international market share.

Solutions:

- o Codify a Right to Repair.

- o Conventional short-term bailouts do not benefit the Farmer substantially; they pass through to multinational corporations (input suppliers). We need long-term solutions - not a one-time patch.

- o The sale of agricultural assets to foreign entities or multinational corporations must be curtailed; strengthen AFIDA.

- o Anti-trust legislation and legal enforcement for input suppliers.

- o Congress must constitutionally take back control over tariffs and trade policy.

2. YES. Although I strongly believe that we need to enforce our immigration laws, expanding pathways for foreign-born agricultural workers in Montana reflects a simple reality: there aren't enough available local workers to meet demand, and the consequences are already affecting the state's economy and food production. But this isn't just about immigration—it's about keeping Montana's agricultural system functioning in the face of a shrinking workforce. Without those workers, the state risks reduced production, rural economic strain, and long-term damage to a key industry. Because of this, the H-2A temporary agricultural visa is essential. It seasonally complements the domestic workforce - it does not replace it.

There are balancing opinions: Opposition is rooted in the belief that Montana should focus on raising job quality, rebuilding its local workforce, and investing in long-term solutions rather than increasing reliance on temporary foreign labor to address immediate shortages.

3. Montana's critical-access and rural healthcare system must be maintained. As a Cardiologist, I know that delays of even an hour in the care for emergencies such as a heart attack or stroke can mean the difference between life and death. Our current system is broken; our country spends an unsustainable 20% of our economy on healthcare. The One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB) canceled Medicaid support and eliminated subsidies. About 2/3 of Montana Medicaid recipients reside in rural areas; this threatens the ability for our 47 rural health facilities to remain financially viable or to maintain current service levels. An Independent Representative can think out of the box in ways that are not constrained by party dogma. Any effort must first protect the ability to see the doctor of your choice, and must retain coverage for preexisting conditions. Government-run healthcare is not the answer. Above all else, I will fight hard to protect rural healthcare in Montana, because I know what it does.

4. Data centers may generate economic development, but never at the expense of Montana's natural resources and communities. We must protect our health, happiness and way of life that makes our State both unique and enjoyable. I support responsible growth that protects our water and energy systems, and also protects the ability for each potentially affected community to decide for themselves:

- New data centers must be required to use closed-loop cooling systems to eliminate water consumption

- Development should only move forward when there is excess power capacity, ensuring that data centers do not compete with residents or local industries for electricity (no rate increases)

- Use Montana labor to build Montana facilities

- Local control; no federal or state mandate

Potential property tax levies and other financial incentives may generate steady income for local government and schools, but Montana's resources are not unlimited and must be preserved for our children's future.

5. Effective engagement requires more than occasional outreach—it calls for consistent, respectful, government-to-government relationships and a clear commitment to listening and follow-through:

- Meaningful conversation; not just during campaign season but an ongoing dialogue with tribal leaders, councils, and community members

- Real-life representation; adopt concerns about housing, education, infrastructure, economic development, costs of living, and the lack of culturally competent services

- Tribal sovereignty; respect each tribe's authority to govern its own affairs. I will always uphold treaty obligations, work to protect land and water rights, and support law enforcement

- Long-term relationships matter; trust is earned and not given

- Access to care; I will fight for the Indian Health Service as an integral part of my larger effort to protect rural healthcare in Montana

In short, it's about partnership, respect, and sustained engagement - not just representation from afar.

★ ★ ★

HOUSE DISTRICT 33

Note: One candidate for HD 33, Brandon Ler (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire



Ric Holden (Rep)

Age: 64

Location: Glendive

Education: BS degree Business Management, minors marketing, Finance

Occupation: Farmer/Rancher, Insurance representative

Contact information:

phone 406-939-8929, rich@midrivers.com,

website: ricformontana.com

1. Cutting the budget and reducing property taxes

2. All indications are now that the increased budget size from last session is going to outstrip tax revenues. Overall, I would say that we need to hold spending to the rate of inflation. The 2025 budget is going to have to be reexamined and return spending levels back to or pre-2025 levels. Across the board cuts will be needed, sincere negotiations between the governor and the legislature are needed. It is way too early to say what department budgets are going to be cut, but I don't see any room for new spending over inflation and certainly there is no room for new government program requests.

3. Without a doubt, we have to look at the property tax bills passed last session that shifted tax burdens around rather than lowering the tax rates for the people. We are going broke based on the current budget. So, yes, of course, we have to revisit the tax

laws passed last session.

4. Yes, I do support delisting the grizzly bear. The US House Committee on Natural Resources has voted in favor of delisting the bear from the Endangered Species Act. The grizzly population has exceeded the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery goals for over two decades. Time has passed and the bear populations have recovered.

5. Nope. The last thing we need to do is give Helena politicians one more thing to tax. They always tax to the max and look for more.

★ ★ ★

HOUSE DISTRICT 36

Note: Both candidates for HD 36, Ty Linger and Loren Hinebauch, did not participate in this questionnaire.

★ ★ ★

HOUSE DISTRICT 40

Mike Vinton (Rep)

Age: 59

Location: Billings

Education: BS in Computer Engineering and an MBA.

Occupation: General Contractor, developer

Contact information:

website: www.vintonformontana.com,

email: mikev@vintonlog.com, 406-855-3345, Facebook Mike Vinton For Montana

1. Reduce taxes and limit budget

2. Reverse general fund revenues from going into the GO Trust. Limit new capital expenditures, re-evaluate DPHHS expenditures, re-direct existing revenue streams to provide tax relief

3. Yes. The constitutional initiative just dropped is a good step, but more needs to be done.

4. Yes, the biology says it is time.

5. Not at this time. The legislature can't be trusted.

★ ★ ★

Gunner Cesnik (Rep)

Age: 52

Location: Billings

Education: Some college

Occupation: Self employed Disabled Veteran

Contact information:

gunnr73@yahoo.com

1. Reduce inefficient and ineffective Government spending and insure Government transparency.

2. Let's start by reducing administrative governmental spending. For example this new Montana sign proposed by the Governor is not needed and the amount of money spent on it could have been used elsewhere like healthcare for Seniors, Disabled and Veterans.

3. Yes I would. Let's start by auditing the inefficient and ineffective state administrative agencies. Our citizens deserve transparency and effective services that they pay for through their taxes.

4. Yes I do. I was a former Hunting guide and Packer and the Grizzlies are over populated in Montana. The studies have proven the numbers are out of control. Let's consult with the MFWP Biologist and see what the studies have proven with the barbed wire's on trees that collected the DNA data. We need Transparency with the organizations that are behind the efforts to keep the Grizzlies listed.

5. Yes. We need to balance the Property Taxes and set a cap on the Sales tax. I believe non residents should contribute to all the resources being used otherwise just the land owners are paying for everything that is being used by non residents.

We need to Balance the schools budgets and stop spending money that schools don't have. A school should not be in debt and if they are, we need to reduce administrative costs. We need to be more transparent about local projects. For example the mental health facility in Laurel. We need to in force right to know and right to participation and insure the citizens fully informed how their money is spent. Stop allowing non residents to exploit our court systems when they don't contribute to the judicial and court resources being impacted.



HOUSE DISTRICT 46

Denise Joy (Dem)

Age: 61

Location: Billings

Education: BA Political Science Graduate School Public Policy & Administration

Occupation: Special Needs Assistant

Contact information:

denisejoyforbillings@gmail.com 406-647-0337 Denisejoyforbillings.com

1. My highest priority is to defend the residential property tax relief in the House of Representatives. I was appointed to the House by the Yellowstone County Commissions in December 2025, Having



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

The Montana Senate debates legislation on Jan. 22 in the state Capitol.

served on Billings City Council, residential property values and increasing tax burden was much evident.

During the pandemic, the popularity of Billings as an affordable mid-sized city, increased the demand for residential property and as a consequence higher values. The high values driving up assessment jeopardized the affordability of living in Billings. I am confident that my votes during the session to redress this property tax pressure was very needed. People on fixed incomes and working families are pressured housing with higher values and consequently higher property taxes is a challenge. I am grateful for the opportunity to address a pressing concern of my constituents during the session. My commitment to residential property tax relief has not wavered.

2. For higher income tax payers, the large tax cut that was passed in 2025 creates a real hazard of forcing cuts in essential services. Having a tax on those with high income, would address some of the budget constraints on spending. The median income in Montana is \$72,500. Adjusted median income for Yellowstone County is \$62,000. The total taxes paid by those earning \$22,500 as a percentage of income is 9.5%. People earning \$22,000 to 42,500 are paying 7.5% as a percentage of income. Others earning \$74,000 to \$130,000 are paying 8.5%. Montanans earning \$574,000 are paying a total percentage of taxes of 6.7%. There is an obvious inequity that is hurting the working poor and people of House District 46. I have not and will not support these gross inequities. Cutting essential services hurts those paying more in taxes than

people earning \$574,000. We can fund essential services adequate by addressing taxing inequities.

3. No, I would not support revisiting property tax reforms. The shift from commercial taxes onto residential properties has created a burden. The direction of revisiting property tax is to shift the burden back on residential properties. The commercial tax base has changed over the decades as Main Streets have suffered from a lack of government policy aimed at support of local business. The absence of policy addressing challenges and opportunities for local business have changed Main Streets and reduced the commercial tax base. Local businesses have suffered from preferential corporate benefits both from taxes and incentives. When taxes for corporations are cut, few people will benefit from those cuts. The majority of corporations buy back stock or increase share dividends from tax cuts, not reinvestment in the Montana economy. Share price increases create wealth for large investors and leave ordinary people suffering cuts to essential services.

4. I don't support the delisting despite the proponents suggesting that the Grizzly population no longer is endangered. The Endangered Species Act uses the terminology of conservation and to conserve. To determine a range of grizzly population numbers for delisting is subjective. The idea of conservation is equally subjective. If conflicts between grizzlies, ranching, and tourist populations drive our discussion, we will not be discussing habitat issues, instead we have fear. From the time of the grizzly being listed as endangered and now, human

have developed wild spaces. The wild areas available for the grizzly population are heavily impacted by human development. The fragmentation of wild spaces can endanger grizzly survival. The grizzly needs many acres of wild lands to survive and human development impacts wild areas. Conserving grizzlies means wild habitat for their survival.

5. I don't support a statewide sales tax. Sale taxes are regressive and are paid by those who can afford it least. When food is excluded from the tax, things like diapers, wipes and children's clothing are included. This is paid by parents that struggle with increasing costs. Cars are essential to survival in Billings. The tax would increase costs on buying every component and necessity of operating a car. Those on a fixed income and equally subjected to increased costs. A retired person who is not able to work will have greater household costs. Billings benefits from shoppers that come from North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. These surrounding states have a sales tax and they come to Billings to buy items without the tax. If we adopt a sales tax, we may lose the economic boost from those shoppers. Although we have many tourists that visit Montana, the people paying the tax will live and work here.



Erin R Tate (Dem)

Age: 44

Location: Billings

Education: Master's Degree in Social Work and a Master's Degree in English

Occupation: Mental health therapist

Contact information:
erin4mt.com;

erininformontana@gmail.com; 781-296-6830; facebook: Tate for MT

1. Affordability

2. While I would want to take a closer look at fiscal reporting, I believe we need to find ways to keep the majority of revenue in local communities. My understanding is that the current financial equations we are using are somewhat antiquated. I would suggest an overhaul of how funding is allocated versus cutting essential services.

3. Yes I would. Currently, we have a disproportionate financial burden on individuals who own-and live in-their own homes.

4. I do not support grizzly bear delisting. We have seen time and time again that when a critical species is delisted it becomes a target, further endangering the longevity of the species.

5. I support the right for each city/ community to decide if they want to institute a sales tax and for the citizens of that city/ community to decide how to spend revenue from such a tax.



HOUSE DISTRICT 47

Note: All candidates for HD 47 did not participate in this questionnaire.



HOUSE DISTRICT 49

Note: All candidates for HD 49 did not participate in this questionnaire.



HOUSE DISTRICT 51

Jodee Etchart (Rep)



Age: old enough
Location: Billings
Education: BA Rocky Mountain College, BS MSU-B
Occupation: Physician Assistant
Contact information: JodeeforMT.com

1. Continue the work to increase healthcare access, lower prescription drug costs, and decrease regulation. Regulations put in place by unelected officials can burden businesses and drive up costs. Montanans deserve transparent, accountable policymaking that puts them first.

2. We need to focus on efficiency before cuts. That means eliminating duplication across agencies, improving coordination between departments like DPHHS, Labor and Industry, Commerce, and DOJ, DOT, and Revenue, to ensure taxpayer dollars are used effectively. I will prioritize protecting essential services while reducing administrative overhead, streamlining programs, and holding agencies accountable for measurable outcomes. Every dollar should deliver value-- and if it doesn't, we should fix it or cut it.

3. Yes. Revisiting property tax reforms to ensure Montana residents receive fair treatment is important. This includes strengthening homestead exemptions for property owned by Montana residents and addressing how outbuildings and accessory structures--such as workforce housing--are assessed so they are not taxed disproportionately. Property tax policy should support residents, not penalize practical use of property. A taxpayer bill of rights could also help bring greater transparency and discipline

to spending at the local level.

4. Once recovery goals are met, management should occur at the state level.

5. Sixty percent of Montanans oppose a statewide sales tax--and I agree. Montanans should not be taxed on income, property, and purchases. A sales tax would largely fall on Montana residents, not out of state visitors. We should focus on responsible spending and making better use of existing revenues before considering any new statewide tax.



Lana Tibbetts (Rep)



Age: 56
Location: Billings
Education: Bachelor in Business Marketing Montana State Bozeman
Occupation: Performance Horse Broker/Trainer
Contact information: lanatibbetts.com

lanamtibbetts@gmail.com 406-951-2394

1. Reduce spending and the best way to reign in government growth is to cut taxes.

2. The reason we have a deficit is because the legislature created it by funneling tax dollars into a newly created trust fund that goes towards funding childcare and housing along with other programs. These dollars will continue to be siphoned off into the trust, making the state look like it is running on a deficit. The siphoning of the surplus was planned to prevent future legislatures from sending back rebates or cutting taxes. I am running because I am tired of Republicans who think they know what to do with your tax dollars better than you do.

3. Montana's property tax 'fix' was a joke. It was so bad that the Senate sponsor of one of the two tax shift bills is running a ballot initiative to fix his mistake. Our property taxes have increased thousands of dollars in the last 5 or so years, yet the legislature decided to increase taxes on some, to decrease residential taxes on the average taxpayer by a few hundred dollars. The reality, we have a spending problem and we need legislatures who understand and acknowledge this fact.

4. Yes, Montana should manage the wildlife in our state. A grizzly bear travels up to 200-300 miles. The population has exploded and they are a significant problem for ranchers, who must show proof of the dead animals for compensation. The wild game deer, elk, and moose populations have decreased significantly. The safety of hunters and hikers is also an issue due to the grizzly bears.

5. Would a sales tax allow Montanan's to pay less taxes on the backs of out of state tourists? The state's Legislative Fiscal Division estimates that 88% of a state sales tax would be paid for by Montanan's. Many of Montana's tourists are not shopping, but instead are often spending their time in national and state



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

The American Flag is seen through the front window of the Montana State Capitol on April 18.

parks as well as recreating. A sales tax would also not bring in enough money to replace our property taxes. The state estimates a 4% sales tax would generate about \$1.3 billion in revenue, while Montana's current property taxes generate \$2.4 billion. Proportionally, more tax is collected from out-of-state residents through property taxes than a sales tax capped at 4%.



HOUSE DISTRICT 52

Note: One candidate for HD 52, Stacy Zinn (Rep), did not respond to this questionnaire by the provided deadline.

Ed Walker (Rep)



Age: 55
Location: Billings
Occupation: Director of Business Development, Loenbro
Contact information: www.WalkerForMT.com, Ed@WalkerForMT.com

1. My top priority is addressing rising property taxes. Montana has a budget surplus, yet families are being squeezed by higher costs driven by policy decisions. We need to rebalance the system so homeowners, renters, and small businesses are not carrying an unfair burden, while keeping Montana competitive for growth and investment.

2. Montana doesn't have a revenue problem, it has a prioritization problem. Before considering any new taxes, we should review current spending, eliminate inefficiencies, and focus government on core responsibilities. That includes reducing unnecessary programs, limiting administrative growth, and ensuring taxpayer dollars are used effectively while

maintaining essential services.

3. Yes. The current approach has shifted the burden onto homeowners and renters in ways that are not sustainable or fair. With a state surplus, we should be focused on reducing property taxes -- not increasing or shifting them. I would support revisiting those policies to ensure a more balanced, transparent, and taxpayer-friendly system.

4. Yes. Grizzly bear populations have recovered well beyond original recovery goals, particularly in areas like the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Management should return to the states so Montana can balance conservation with the safety of our communities, livestock producers, and outdoor recreation economy.

5. I would only consider a sales or consumption tax if it replaces a major existing tax (such as property or income tax) and does not add to the overall burden. Montanans should not be subjected to multiple layers of taxation. Any proposal must be revenue-neutral or reduce taxes overall, with clear protections for working families.



HOUSE DISTRICT 53

Note: One candidate for HD 53, Nelly Nicol (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire

Troy Charbonneau (Rep)



Age: Old enough to vote.
Location: Billings
Education: Law Enforcement and medical.
Occupation: Paramedic and Retired Detective (Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office)
Contact information:

MontanaHD53.com; charbonneau4MT@icloud.com

1. Public safety and fiscal responsibility. For over 25 years, I've made real-world decisions where lives and resources matter. In Helena, my focus will be keeping communities safe while ensuring taxpayers' money is spent responsibly and efficiently.

2. We don't have a revenue problem—we have a spending problem. I support eliminating waste, reducing administrative bloat, and prioritizing core services like public safety, infrastructure, and education. Government should focus on what it must do, not everything it could do.

3. Many Montanans are feeling the pressure, and we need to revisit reforms to ensure they actually provide relief. I support solutions that protect homeowners while maintaining fairness and stability for local services.

4. Grizzly populations have recovered well beyond original targets. Management should return to the state, where decisions can be made based on local conditions, public safety, and science.

5. I believe Montana should maintain its long-standing position against a statewide sales tax. Our focus should be on responsible spending and meaningful property tax relief.



HOUSE DISTRICT 55

Brad Barker (Rep)



Age: 53

Location: Luther

Education: Bachelor of Science in Mathematical Economics from the United States Military Academy at West Point, Masters in Public Policy Management from Georgetown

University, and Masters in Military Studies from the United States Marine Corps University at Quantico, Virginia
Occupation: Mergers and Acquisition Advisor, Small Business Owner, and Retired US Army Aviation Officer (AH-64 Apache Pilot)

Contact information: bradbarker.com, brad@bradbarker.com, 406-426-1034, <https://www.facebook.com/Representative.Barker>, <https://www.instagram.com/representativebarker/>

1. My number one priority is putting Montana residents first – protecting and

expanding the property tax cuts that saved more than 80% of Montana homeowners' money, while standing up to party bosses and out-of-state special interests who want to roll back those gains. My job is to deliver results for my constituents, not scorecards from special interests.

2. As a legislator, I take seriously Montana's constitutional requirement to pass a balanced budget, and I'm proud of the fiscally responsible budgets my colleagues and I have passed in the last two sessions. We've been able to keep total state spending increases to less than a half a percent a year on average while still lowering property and income taxes. We need to continue to monitor the budget on a quarterly basis and plan for responsible reductions as necessary.

3. The Homestead Tax Exemption that the Montana legislature passed in 2025 brought needed property tax relief to 80% of Montanans. In future sessions, we need to continue to find ways to relieve even more of the tax burden and make the application process simpler.

4. Yes

5. No. A sales tax should not be considered without additional constitutional protections requiring its use to buy down property taxes. Further,

no local option sales tax should be considered since it would likely have a disproportionately negative impact on local businesses, giving further advantage to online retailers.



Mary Horman (Rep)



Age: 65

Location: Red Lodge

Education: Bachelors Psychology, Calvin College and Bachelors Nursing Montana State University
Occupation: Registered Nurse

Contact information:

maryforcarboncounty@gmail.com www.maryhormancarboncounty.com 406-696-4454

- 1.** Affordability
- 2.** Reduce spending by eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse across government
- 3.** Absolutely top priority
- 4.** Yes, Carbon County has 71% of bear encounters in Montana.
- 5.** No, the legislature needs to reform our current tax system.



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SENATE DISTRICT 14

Eric Albus (Rep)



Age: 57
Location: Hinsdale
Education: some college
Occupation: Rancher/farmer
Contact information: albusformontana.com

1. Cutting government spending

2. Finding non-essential programs to cut and trimming back government growth.

3. Yes I would. The 2025 session was my first year of serving in the legislature, and we provided property tax relief for a lot of folks, but sadly not all. I'd like to find a way to give all MONTANA RESIDENTS property tax relief.

4. Yes, grizzly populations are increasing and at all time highs. We are seeing a lot of grizzly bear encounters with humans and livestock that are not ending well. It is past time to delist.

5. Not at this time



Mark Wicks (Rep)



Age: 56
Location: Inverness
Education: Associate degree in Aviation technology from Lane Community College, Attended MSU Bozeman for Technology Education and Lulea University, Lulea

Sweden.

Occupation: Farmer/Rancher
Contact information: www.wicks4freedom.com

1. Reducing spending and fraud, so we can reduce taxes.

2. I think if every agency trims the fat, and we eliminate the "feel good" programs that are not necessary we can create a budget that lives within our means and delivers needed services.

3. Yes

4. Absolutely! We have grizzly bears roaming as far east as Havre because of overcrowding in the mountains. We have hit all the benchmarks except in a couple of areas where the bears don't seem to want to live. There are grizzlies denning on the prairies and raising litters of cubs, pictures of sows trailing three or four cubs through wheat fields are not uncommon. They are not endangered at all and are in fact thriving. There is absolutely no reason to not delist them.

5. No. I don't think Montanans want the government in every transaction they make, or to create a bigger tax bureaucracy. I hear some people say that a sales tax will make the tourists pay their fair share. I don't believe in passing a tax that a tourist pays for maybe a week out of the year and the rest of us pay 52 weeks out of the year is a good idea. I do believe that the current property taxes have been made to be intentionally painful in order to get Montanans to accept another form of tax.



SENATE DISTRICT 18

Note: One candidate for SD 18, Greg Kmetz (Rep), didn't participate in this questionnaire.



Doug Martens (Rep)



Age: 61
Location: Forsyth
Education: High school
Occupation: Rancher
Contact information: www.martensforsd18.com, martens4senate@gmail.com, www.facebook.com/dougmartensformontana

1. My number one priority will be my constituents. As a State Senator, I promise to listen to my constituents, study the issues, and vote to protect agriculture and rural energy producers, both of which serve as the economic backbone of my district.

2. As Rosebud County Commissioner, I was able to upgrade local infrastructure and maintain critical local services without raising taxes. In the legislature, I'll take the same common sense, conservative approach that my fellow commissioners and I took to our county budget process. My priority will be finding ways to tighten our belts, cut red tape, and ensure we can continue to deliver critical services like law enforcement without raising taxes on Montanans.

3. I will work to protect the property tax relief passed by the 2025 legislature that brought the majority of Montanans real tax relief and I will continue to work with my fellow legislators to find new ways to lower taxes and make living in Montana, especially rural Montana, more affordable.

4. I do support grizzly bear delisting. It's an excellent example of a recovery program that's been successful. I'd encourage other state and federal agencies that manage wildlife to look to the grizzly bear recovery program for lessons that can be applied to future efforts.

5. No. Montana has become increasingly unaffordable over the last decade and as a result we're seeing the next generation having to move out of state to find economic opportunity. A sales tax is just another tax increase. When I'm in the legislature, I'll seek out ways to lower the tax burden on Montana while maintaining our infrastructure and critical services.



SENATE DISTRICT 19

Barry Usher (Rep)



Age: 60
Location: I live rural between Laurel & Molt
Occupation: Business Owner
Contact information: www.barryusher.com
www.facebook.com/barryusherformontana
barry4montana@gmail.com 406-252-2888

1. Reduce taxes/Reduce spending
2. I think we should concentrate on the waste and fraud in our government programs
3. Yes – this past session was a "Tax Shift" to business & commercial property As President Reagan said, "business does not pay taxes, they pass onto the consumer"
4. yes It is my understanding that we are over populated with Grizzly Bears
5. only if we get rid of either property tax or income tax



Chris Rindal (Rep)



Age: 54
Location: Lewistown
Education: B.S. Animal Science – Montana State University
Occupation: Business Owner
Contact information: Rindal4Senate.com

1. Represent the Constituents of Senate District 19
2. Every 2 years the Governor is required to present the Legislature with a balanced budget, and the legislative process takes those recommendations under consideration. I will support a thoughtful and balanced budget.
3. No
4. Yes – I believe Grizzly Bear management is best left to our State
5. Not unless it replaces Income or Property Tax.



SENATE DISTRICT 25

Note: One candidate for SD 25, Tom Bick (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.



Dennis Lenz (Rep)



Age: 64
Location: Billings
Education: Certificate in Biblical Studies – Yellowstone Valley Bible Institute. Certificate in Ranch Management – Texas Christian University.
Occupation: Retired Fire Captain – Billings Fire Department, 25 Years. Retired Farmer – Operated a family farm, 40+ Years.
Contact information: Website – DennisLenz.com Email – lenz4legislature@outlook.com

1. Greater efficiencies and accountability within the Department of Public Health and Human Services

2. Within my budget committee that oversees human services, we weigh every option carefully as this arena affects every people and their families. Over the past several years the legislature has helped significantly with provider rates in elderly and disabled care, strengthened our computer systems that help the public, and renewed our aging mental health facilities. I understand the need for these and many other services, and some belt tightening will be coming; but when times are tough, we need to be certain that we protect our most needy.

3. Yes. What a slim majority of the legislature passed in 2025 was not reform, but was a confusion of our property tax system. There were good bills that could have truly changed property taxes for the better. We need to revisit those ideas.

4. Yes. The grizzly bears are on the list because at one time they were endangered. It is quite obvious to me and anyone else who spends time in the wild that they are not endangered anymore.

5. The current discussion on a sales tax involves piling that tax on top of the property and income taxes already in place. That doesn't make any sense at all. As I am walking the doors and visiting my constituents, it is obvious that there is no consensus on this issue at the present time.