

# VOTER GUIDE

2026 PRIMARY  
ELECTION

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**LEE MONTANA**

# 2026 VOTER GUIDE

## PRIMARY ELECTION

### LEE MONTANA

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, in-

cluding 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?

## Western Congressional District

**Question 1.** What is your vision for supporting outdoor recreation, tourism, and conservation while also promoting responsible economic development in Montana's fastest growing areas?

**Question 2.** Housing remains un-reachable for many Montanans in the state's more populated areas. What is the role of Congress in addressing housing affordability and what can representatives do to fix it?

**Question 3.** Do you support President Trump's military action in Iran and



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

**THOM BRIDGE,**  
INDEPENDENT  
RECORD

Venezuela, and how would you vote on a resolution to reinforce congressional authorization of military action?

**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.** Tens of thousands of constituents in this district receive health insurance through Medicaid. If elected, how would you ensure that people who rely on this program don't lose access to health care, especially as the provisions of the "big, beautiful bill" go into effect?

## 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 state-wide sales tax? Please elaborate.

## Robin Kendall for Montana HD94



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Paid for by Robin Kendall for Montana, Democrat, PO Box 7316, Missoula, MT 59802

## 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

**Contact information:** Charlesformt@gmail.com, Charleswalkingchildforussenate.com

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 hard-working seasonal workers. Expand/fix H-2A and legal pathways so farms get reliable labor fast. When skilled H2A 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.kyleaustinmt.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 TARIFF 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 over see 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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213-3217

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**Contact information:**

Mikeformontana.com, Montanaformike@gmail.com

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

**THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD**

A voter drops her ballot at the Lewis and Clark County Elections Office in Helena on Sept. 9.

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**Contact information:** 406-370-1492, info@

reillyformontana.com, reillyformontana.com

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

**Contact information:** lee@calhounformt.com

**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



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

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

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 free-

dom 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.

**Contact information:** AlmeforSenate.com  
info@almevorsenate.com

**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. After-

wards, 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

# MONTANA VALUES MONTANA'S FUTURE

IF YOU WANT CHANGE  
 IN WASHINGTON,  
 IT'S TIME TO  
**VOTE  
 OUTSIDE  
 THE BOX!**



**VOTE FOR  
 KYLE AUSTIN!**

Kyle is a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Montanan, pharmacist, farmer and small business owner who understands the challenges facing working families across Montana.

- ✓ THE ONLY CANDIDATE WITH HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE
- ✓ THE ONLY CANDIDATE WITH AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUND
- ✓ THE ONLY CANDIDATE THAT OWNS A SMALL BUSINESS

Find out more at:  
[KyleAustinMT.com](http://KyleAustinMT.com)



Paid for by Austin for Congress, 1410 38th St W, Billings, MT 59102 (L)

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. 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 Commissions, 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:** bu-

kacek4PSC.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(c)(3) non-profit that generates significant revenue for Helena annually through the Montana Pride celebration, which I've directed for over a



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

The Montana State Capitol on Jan. 22.

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.



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Voters cast their ballots on Nov. 5 at the Wedsworth Hall polling center in Cascade, Mont.

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 busi-ness/economics

**Contact information:** 406-431-3510, joe.dooling@outlook.com



ing@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, minor in Government; Willamette University Graduate Studies in

Management

**Contact information:** [www.Sandersfor-Montana.com](http://www.Sandersfor-Montana.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 organization 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 bur-

den 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.



## 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.



## Western Congressional District

Note: One candidate for Western Congressional District, Nick Sheedy (Lib), did not participate in this questionnaire. 2



### Ryan Busse (Dem)

**Age:** 56

**Location:** Kalispell (have lived in the Flathead for 31 years)

**Education:** Graduated Rural Public High School – Obtained Bach. Degree In History/Political Sci

**Occupation:** Former Firearms Exec, Current Communications Consultant

**Contact information:** [www.busseformontana.com](http://www.busseformontana.com)

1. All Americans own our public lands, but right now corporate interests have too much influence over how we manage them, and this is threatening outdoor recreation for all of us. For more than a century, generations of citizens, often led by Montanans like Lee Metcalf and Pat Williams, have worked to establish critical regulatory safeguards that balance the interests of development and ensure the immense power of large corporations does not usurp the interests of millions of American citizens, including all Native Americans, and I am dedicated to helping reestablish those safeguards. “Fast Track” proposals currently being pushed by Republicans in places that aim to ignore our laws and threaten rivers, such as the Sheep Creek mine in the Bitterroot, are dangerously wrong, and I am devoted to fighting to ensure that industry is held to the standards set forth in our laws.

2. Instead of spending hundreds of billions of dollars on foreign wars and an out-of-control ICE budget, we should be expanding federal programs that help Montanans purchase homes. These programs should include expanded down payment assistance for first-time home buyers. We should also institute a federally guaranteed low-interest program for homebuyers. I am also in favor of exploring other federal programs that provide rental assistance and expand the use of modular homes and equity-sharing programs. We should be pushing a multitude of buttons and developing new ones with the urgency this situation demands.

3. No. The unchecked growth and deployment of executive power is dangerous for our country. Not only should the War Powers Resolution be enforced, but Congress must also step up and act on a myriad of other responsibilities. The current sycophants in



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Voter wearing scrubs casts their ballot in the 2024 general election on Nov. 5 at the Montana ExpoPark in Great Falls.

Congress have done far too little to push back on disastrous tariffs that are driving up costs and killing Western Montana businesses. The current majority in Congress refuses to hold hundreds of powerful men who trafficked and abused young girls criminally accountable. Congress also refuses to exercise oversight over, or limit funding for, poorly trained masked ICE agents who have killed American citizens. These wars are costing billions of dollars per day and driving up fuel prices, even as the same Congress says we don't have money for healthcare and housing in this country. It's past time for Congress to grow a spine and do its job.

4. Current proposals to rapidly develop data centers in Montana without a strong regulatory framework are dangerous. If development is to be considered then there must be more than empty promises about “doing it right.” We must demand those promises are in law. I am devoted to fighting to make certain that no favors are done for tech billionaires. I am devoted to ensuring that we do not risk a single gallon of water quality and that power rates for Montanans are not raised a single penny, so that the wealthiest AI companies can profit from our

state. Here again, I will be a forceful advocate for the people of this state over the powerful corporate interests seeking to exploit Montana.

5. This Congress has purposely imperiled our rural hospitals by gutting Medicaid coverage and slashing ACA tax credits, both of which are dramatically reducing health coverage for rural Montanans and dangerously lowering funding for rural hospitals. And they've been clear about why: they needed to cut these services so that the wealthiest Americans, like Elon Musk, could receive a huge tax cut. I am proudly fighting not just to reverse these disastrous policies but to institute universal health care for all Americans. It's time to stop letting wealthy insurance corporations rig the system and instead insist on basic decency and security for the people who make this country work. Doing this will require courage, and it will require dealing with many Democrats who have stood in the way. I'm not afraid to elbow them out of the way either. I'm committed to fighting for immediate conversion to universal healthcare, which would shore up our rural healthcare system and help all Montanans.



### Christi Jacobsen (Rep)

**Age:** 50

**Location:** Helena

**Education:** Graduated from Capital High School in Helena, Montana. Earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, (BA) from Carroll College in 1997. Earned a Master's degree in Public



Administration (MPA) from the University of Montana in 2000.

**Occupation:** Montana Secretary of State  
**Contact information:** [christijacobsen.com](http://christijacobsen.com)

1. Montana's outdoor economy isn't separate from our way of life – it is our way of life. My vision is to protect the lands, waters, and access that define Montana, while ensuring our communities can grow in a way that is responsible and benefits the people who actually live here. That means defending public access, supporting responsible forest and land management, and pushing back on federal overreach that limits Montana's ability to manage its own resources. It also means

recognizing that conservation and economic growth are not mutually exclusive – they go hand in hand when done right. In my time as Secretary of State, I've worked to cut red tape, implement efficiencies, and help create an environment where small businesses and entrepreneurs can thrive – including those tied directly to tourism, outdoor recreation, and local economies. That same approach applies here.

**2.** Congress absolutely has a responsibility to address the federal policies that are making the problem worse. My approach starts with getting Washington out of the way where it's driving up costs – burdensome regulations, delays in permitting, and so forth. We need to expand access to land where appropriate, streamline federal processes, and ensure that Montana communities have the flexibility to grow without unnecessary federal interference. At the same time, Congress can play a constructive role by supporting infrastructure investments that make housing development possible and by encouraging policies that increase supply rather than artificially inflating demand. In my role as Secretary of State, I've worked to cut red tape and make it easier for businesses to operate and grow in Montana, and that same mindset applies to housing. We should be empowering builders, supporting workforce housing, and ensuring that growth benefits Montanans.

**3.** I support President Trump's recent military actions in Iran and Venezuela because they are rooted in a simple principle: protecting American lives, defending our allies, and deterring regimes that threaten American interests. Peace is always the goal, but peace is achieved through strength – and when adversaries test the United States, we must be willing to act decisively. At the same time, Congress has an important constitutional role in authorizing and overseeing military force. I would support efforts to ensure that any sustained or expanded military engagement is clearly defined, strategically grounded, and authorized consistent with the law. My position is straightforward: strong leadership abroad, peace through strength, and adherence to our Constitution.

**4.** Data centers bring investment, good jobs, and long-term revenue, but they must respect Montana's resources and communities. I support responsible development that balances growth with protections for water, energy, and land. Congress should back infrastructure and energy solutions that allow projects to succeed while giving Montana the flexibility to set standards that safeguard local resources. Growth should work for Montanans, not against them.

**5.** I believe Montanans who rely on Medicaid deserve stable, reliable access to care. If elected, I would work to protect funding for the program and ensure state flexibility to ad-



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

The Montana House of Representative gathers on the house floor for the opening day of the 69th Montana Legislative Session at the Montana State Capitol.

minister it efficiently. That said, I believe reforms with responsible privatization are necessary to make the system viable long-term. Insolvency would mean losing it altogether.



**Kimberly A Persico (Ind)**



**Age:** 57

**Location:** Hot Springs

**Education:** I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry from the University of WI-River Falls.

**Occupation:** Self employed. I have a consulting business and rental property.

**Contact information:** [www.keepingamericaspromise.com](http://www.keepingamericaspromise.com), [keepingamericaspromise@gmail.com](mailto:keepingamericaspromise@gmail.com).

**1.** Protecting our public lands is an important issue for us in Montana. I will never support selling our public lands. I also do not support rescinding the roadless rule or repealing the Wilderness Study Area protections. With that being said, I do fully support the multi-use aspect of our public lands. I

support responsibly developed Sustainable Yield Units to support the timber industry. I support responsibly developed mining projects that do not contaminate sensitive wetland/water environments or destroy indigenous sacred sights. I support classifying bison as livestock and letting them graze on our public lands. I support fully funding our National Parks, Monuments and lands. The economic impact of our public lands is enormous as must be carefully preserved for ourselves and future generations.

**2.** Congress can do many things to help bring down the cost of housing. It can enact tax credits for entry-level home construction and conversion of unused offices and retail space into housing. Infrastructure investment in roads, water and sewage systems for new and existing affordable communities will bring down prices. Investing in research into new construction technologies like 3D-printed housing will enable efficient, climate-resilient communities to be built quickly and relatively inexpensively. Congress can prohibit corporations from buying up single family homes for rental properties. It can also encourage cities and

towns to relax restrictive zoning and building codes to reduce costs.

**3.** I do not support the military action in Iran or Venezuela. I would vote to enforce the War Powers Resolution of 1973. Committing our armed forces to extended conflict should not be left to the judgement of one person. The collective judgement of both the President and Congress has to apply to ensure that our initial and continuing involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by circumstances, and has a clearly defined scope and duration of authority under which hostilities are undertaken.

**4.** Data centers need to be carefully regulated. Their energy usage must not negatively affect prices for the average consumer. The biggest issue for data centers in Montana is water usage. Montana, being a semi-arid state to begin with, needs to have strict water use plans in place to protect our waters. We already have streams and rivers drying out from naturally occurring weather patterns. We must not let overconsumption by data centers exacerbate the difficult conditions we already face due to climate change.

**5.** I support the Medicare for All by Choice option for healthcare. We need a healthcare option in this country that is not controlled by profit. Until we can get to that, provisions in the Big Beautiful Bill can be modified to help people retain benefits. Requiring states to assess eligibility every 6 months is burdensome and should be revised back to yearly. The rural poor in Montana have limited access to jobs. The exemption to the work requirement needs to take that into serious consideration before removing people from Medicaid rolls. The imposition of \$35 cost sharing per service will be prohibitive to low income people. This should be reduced or eliminated. The Big Beautiful Bill reduced a state's ability to collect provider taxes from 6% to 3.5%. This will cause many states to be unable to fund their Medicaid programs, which will require them to reduce eligibility, benefits, and provider payments. The provider tax restriction should be reinstated to the 6% level.



**Russell Cleveland (Dem)**



**Age:** 40

**Location:** Saint Regis

**Education:** MBA

**Occupation:** Entrepreneur

**Contact information:**

[www.russellcleveland.org](http://www.russellcleveland.org)

**1.** I think you start by recognizing that in Montana, these things aren't separate. Outdoor recreation, tourism, conservation, and economic development are all tied together. Our public lands, rivers, and open spaces aren't just who we are, they're a big part of our economy. If we get conservation wrong, we get everything else wrong too. I'm not against growth, but it has to be done right and in a way that respects the people who already live here. That means being honest about impacts like housing, infrastructure, water, and access. We need transparency, local input, and clear guardrails so communities aren't left holding the bag. At the same time, we should support small businesses, outfitters, guides, and local tourism. We also have to protect access. Public lands belong to the people of Montana. At the end of the day, this is about balance. We can grow, but we have to do it in a way that protects what makes Montana, Montana and keeps it affordable for the people who live here.

**2.** Housing is one of the biggest issues I hear about across Montana. But it's not just a supply problem. It's a wage problem too. Yes, we need more workforce and affordable housing. Congress can help by investing in infrastructure and creating incentives for builders to build housing people can actually afford, not just high-end development. I also support banning corporate ownership



**THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD**

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of houses. At the same time, people need to be able to afford to live where they work. I support a 50 to 1 pay cap for executive compensation. It's simple. If companies want to pay executives more, they have to raise wages across the board. Because we're not going to solve the housing crisis if people still can't afford rent.

I've seen this firsthand. I converted a triplex into a multiplex and offered it to teachers at a fixed rate. They still live there today. We need to address both sides. Build more housing and make sure people can afford to live in it.

**3.** No, I don't support it. And this isn't just about policy. It's about the Constitution. The power to take this country to war doesn't belong to one person. It belongs to Congress. That's not optional, that's the law. What we're seeing right now is a pattern of military action without clear congressional authorization, and that's a problem. It takes us down a dangerous path where decisions this serious aren't being debated, voted on, or held accountable. If I were in Congress, I would vote to reinforce that authority. Because accountability matters. Especially when you're talking about sending Americans into harm's

way. We can't have a system where one person makes those calls without oversight. That's not how our government is supposed to work. If we're going to take military action, it should be debated openly, authorized by Congress, and supported by the American people. That's how you protect both our troops and our democracy.

**4.** I'm not against development, but it has to be done right. Right now with data centers, there's too much we don't know. Water use, energy demand, sound, long-term impacts, and what it means for people living nearby. I was the only candidate at the Bonner meeting where they're looking at putting a data center across from a school. People have real concerns and deserve real answers. I support a moratorium until we get them. That means transparency. No redacted plans. No backroom deals. Communities deserve to know what's proposed before anything moves forward. We need guardrails. Sound studies, protections for water and energy use, and protecting Montanans' privacy. Communities need a real say upfront. If these projects move forward, they should benefit Montanans. Good-paying jobs using Montana union and local workers. This is about bal-

ance. Development must respect people, protect resources, and be transparent and accountable. Until then, I don't support moving forward.

**5.** Medicaid isn't abstract policy. It's people.

It's families, seniors, kids, especially in rural communities where it's the difference between getting care or going without. I'll fight to protect it. If changes from this bill take coverage away, raise costs, or make access harder, I don't support that. We should be strengthening access, not cutting it. But we also need to look at the bigger picture. I support Medicare for All+. Full coverage including dental, vision, hearing, mental health, and real access for rural communities. And we can pay for it. I support a 5 percent wealth tax on billionaires, roughly a thousand people. That would generate about \$4.4 trillion. Enough to cover Medicare for All+, universal childcare, and still put about \$2 trillion toward our national debt. This comes down to priorities. No one should have to choose between their health and everything else. I'll fight to protect Medicaid now and build a system that works for everyone.



### Matt Rains (Dem)

**Age:** 46

**Location:** Simms

**Education:** Graduated from Simms High School in Montana, received an Undergraduate Degree in Systems Engineering from West Point and an MBA from Washington University in St. Louis.

**Occupation:** Rancher

**Contact information:** [www.mattrainsformontana.com](http://www.mattrainsformontana.com), [info@mattrainsformontana.com](mailto:info@mattrainsformontana.com)

1. Montana's outdoor economy generates billions in revenue and defines who we are. My vision is to keep it that way while growing it responsibly. That means restoring the staffing cuts to the Forest Service, BLM, and Fish & Wildlife Service that have gutted our wildfire response and trail maintenance. It means investing in the infrastructure – trailheads, campgrounds, access roads – that makes recreation possible and supports the small businesses that depend on it. In fast-growing areas, development pressure is real. I'm a rancher and hunter. I know firsthand that how you develop land matters as much as whether you develop it. I'll push for permit-

ting reform that moves faster while requiring rigorous siting review so we're not trading wildlife corridors and watersheds for short-term growth. The outdoor economy and responsible development aren't in conflict but only if we're honest about the tradeoffs and make smart decisions before permits are issued, not after.

2. Montana's housing crisis is real and it's hitting working families, veterans, seniors, and young people hardest. Congress has direct tools to fix this – and I intend to use them.

I support expanding the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, which is the single most effective federal tool for spurring affordable construction, and pairing it with a state-level match incentive to leverage more Montana investment. I support funding rural housing programs through USDA so that small towns aren't left out of the solution. I'll fight for workforce housing investment in communities where teachers, nurses, and first responders can't afford to live near where they work. And I support zoning reform incentives that reward communities for reducing barriers to building, not mandates, but real financial incentives for states and localities that act.

3. I graduated from West Point, flew Blackhawks and served in Iraq. At West Point, we

are built upon the ideals of Duty, Honor, Country. Attacking a nation, unprovoked, murdering their leadership, with no strategy for what happens next is about the most repulsive use of our service members and military capabilities. When I was a freshman at West Point, my Team Leader was also from Montana. He died in Iraq. Montana's sons and daughters are not pawns for a damn smoke & mirror game to protect the President's reputation. I've lived and served in these countries after an invasion. It takes decades for the local population to engage in standing up a new government. Forever wars truly do last forever. Venezuela was by choice. Iran is by choice. We did this to ourselves. Montanans that voted for Trump were promised that he was the peace candidate. No more wars! He lied to everyone. And Montanans hate being lied to – regardless of party.

4. Montana has real assets that make it attractive for data center development, and AI will only accelerate that demand. I've worked as an engineer inspecting coal and gas plants across the country, so I understand firsthand how our grid operates and what it takes to expand it sustainably. That context shapes how I think about this: data centers can mean jobs and tax revenue, but Montanans need straight answers on water demands, actual net job creation, and whether local com-

munities are getting a fair deal. I'll push for transparency in those negotiations, oppose federal incentives that trade away agricultural water rights or rural infrastructure, and fight for the grid investments needed to meet future energy demand responsibly.

5. I support moving toward universal coverage, and I'll be honest with Montana voters about what that means practically. In the near term, my priorities are clear: roll back Trump's Medicaid cuts that are stripping coverage from tens of thousands of Montanans, restore and permanently extend the enhanced ACA premium tax credits that expired at the start of 2026 and have already caused premiums to more than double for families buying coverage on their own, cut prescription drug costs by extending the \$35 insulin cap beyond Medicare to every Montanan with diabetes and empowering Medicare to negotiate prices on more drugs. We must protect rural hospitals from closure because in Montana, losing your hospital doesn't mean driving to a better one, it means driving an hour to the nearest emergency room. The goal is simple: no Montanan should go bankrupt getting sick, and no rural community should lose its only hospital. I'll work with anyone, Republican or Democrat, to get there.



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# Rains

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### Matt's Top Priorities:

- ✓ Bring down gas prices, and housing costs for Montana
- ✓ Give veterans the care they need and deserve
- ✓ Defend public lands and Montana's heritage
- ✓ Expand rural infrastructure
- ✓ Protect access to health care and rural hospitals that Montanans depend on

Learn more about Matt at [mattrainsformontana.com](http://mattrainsformontana.com)

Paid for by Matt Rains for Montana



**Aaron Flint (Rep)****Age:** 46**Location:** Kalispell**Education:** Local broadcaster and retired Lt. Colonel U.S. Army Reserves and Montana National Guard**Occupation:** Bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Montana**Contact information:** flintformontana.com, info@flintformontana.com

1. There are places where it's appropriate to mine and places where it's not. Striking the balance and managing public lands in accordance with proper multiple use of public lands is important to maintaining our economy and our way of life. Outdoor recreation and tourism has taken off as an economic engine for Western Montana. It may surprise some, but energy and mineral extraction is the largest funding source for conservation projects on federal lands; the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Great American Outdoors Act are funded almost exclusively through oil and gas receipts. If we shut down extraction, like the radical left wants, funding for LWCF/GAOA projects like in Yellowstone, the Flathead National Forest, and state parks vanishes. I will always fight for public access to public lands and make sure that shady foreign companies aren't allowed to squander our resources and pollute our waters.

2. Jessica and I get it, even with my G.I. Bill we are locked into a rental while we wait for interest rates to come down. I understand why so many people are moving their families from high-tax and ultra-regulation states in favor of Montana values. But we need to make sure the Montana dream is affordable. The increased population is one reason for higher home prices. But one of the biggest ways to address this is by cutting the red tape that adds costs and lengthens timelines. We also need to focus on producing building materials here at home. A strong logging industry lowers costs and keeps money in our local economy. Finally, we need more skilled workers. Investing in apprenticeships and trade training will help build more homes and create good paying jobs at the same time. The bottom line is that we need high wage job opportunities so our kids can afford to stay here. We need an economy that allows Montanans to make a life in Montana.

3. Everyone is sick of forever wars. I was deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa. I know what it means to be stuck in a nation building quagmire with no clear end in sight. We owe it to the men and women who serve to be clear about our mission and not drag them into endless conflicts that cost lives and waste your tax dollars. That being said, the Department of War and the President have

existing congressional authorities to conduct limited scope engagements for a short period of time. I believe the commander in chief must have that ability. We live in a dangerous world, and hesitation can cost lives. Regarding the war in Iran and Venezuela, President Trump has taken out terrorists who were responsible for the deaths of Americans either through narco-terrorism or by being the number one state sponsor of terrorism in the world. These limited scope engagements appear to be at or nearing an end which I welcome.

4. I do not support data centers coming into Montana that jack up electricity rates, use all our water, and foul our Montana way of life. Our national security hinges on maintaining digital and cyber dominance over China, Russia and other adversaries. Unfortunately that requires an incredible amount of processing power and behind that are data centers. When local governments are assessing data centers, the two things to keep in mind are: 1. We cannot let China win the chip and data war, and 2. We cannot allow data centers to take advantage of Montana. If Butte or the Crow or whomever has a proposal for a data center, my position is it needs to be done right. They need to produce their own power and, even better, add into the grid and help lower costs for consumers. They should be reliant on their own water, some sites have closed circuits that recycle the same water over and over again and do not rely on rivers and lakes. And they have to use good Montana trade workers.

5. I fully support people who rightly qualify for Medicaid to receive the benefits. However, the rampant fraud and abuse of our Medicaid system needs to end. Billions of dollars in taxpayer-funded programs cannot continue to go to illegal aliens and so-called "migrants" who have been siphoning away resources from important life-saving programs, while the Montanans who pay into the system are struggling to make ends meet. We have seen exactly how disastrous the Medicaid fraud has become in blue cities like Minneapolis, and it is unfair to our fixed-income and working families to let it continue.

**Sam Forstag (Dem)****Age:** 31**Location:** Missoula**Education:** University of Montana, degree in Political Science**Occupation:** Smokejumper and union leader until resigning to run this campaign**Contact information:** www.samformontana.com

1. Public lands make our lives richer by providing a place to hike, ski, hunt, camp, and for a lot of us, they're also the places we work.

Whether it's public servants building trails and fighting fires, guides and outfitters working in tourism, or loggers and mill workers harvesting the timber that pays for our public schools and comprises our homes. Public lands can do all of these things when we act as good stewards. In Congress, I'll fight to reinvest in our public lands, and in public service. Not just to fill the vacancies left from this administration's ongoing attacks, but to significantly expand our investments in public lands staff and active forest management so we can finally work our way out of this constant state of crisis response. I'll fight to expand USDA grants to help modernize and revitalize local mills, and to create clear, workable timelines for processing timber sales challenges to make sure we're engaging in the sort of responsible timber harvest we need.

2. Congress needs to step up and make sure that Americans can meet basic needs like housing. Our representatives have failed to do that in recent years. I'll fight to change that and finally tackle the housing crisis with the urgency it deserves. Here's how:

Significant federal investments to build affordable housing through programs like CDBG, community land trusts, and the first-time home-buyer tax credit, and federal incentives to help build affordable rental units in the places we need them. End corporate home ownership by banning the purchase of residential property by hedge funds and private equity firms and eliminating tax breaks for institutional investors and corporations. Incentivize zoning reforms in places where outdated restrictions are standing in the way of building the housing working people need. Expand investments in apprenticeships and trade school opportunities to increase the number of good union job opportunities in construction and the trades.

3. No. I don't support the decision to drag our country into more endless wars, and I'll fight against it in Congress. The Constitution vests the power to declare war with Congress, not the President. Yet time and again, we end up spending billions and sacrificing American lives in wars that our representatives are too cowardly to take a vote on, much less stop. I'm tired of our government telling us they can afford war while they cut public services to pay for it. I'd vote against authorizing military action in Iran and Venezuela, and against these outrageous requests to spend hundreds of billions on new wars with cuts to healthcare, food assistance, and education to pay for it. That's a disgusting misuse of our resources, and it's another example of what happens when we have a government of the rich, for the rich. Montanans are tired of paying for needless wars by cutting public services, and I'll fight to stop that tradeoff in Congress.

4. The unregulated development of AI is one of the biggest existential threats we face

as a country, and we need Congress to create oversight and requirements now. I'll fight for federal legislation to create three foundational requirements for the building of any new data centers: Providing their own power: AI companies should be required to pay for construction of their own power sources so all of us aren't left footing the bill. Water efficiency: Our water is too important to let corporations waste in the name of profit. We should require data centers to use efficient air-cooling systems. Union labor: If they want to build here, they better do it with union labor. Just as importantly, we urgently need public oversight and regulation of AI companies and the technology they're building. AI has immense potential to concentrate power in the hands of the few, and we cannot just leave that to a few unelected corporate leaders. I'll fight in Congress to act on this before it's too late.

5. Our healthcare system is fundamentally broken. The current system leaves so many of us paying more every year for health insurance that keeps getting worse while insurance corporations rake in more profits. Let's change that. In Congress, I'll fight not just to repeal the Medicaid cuts in the BBB, but to increase our investments in Medicaid. We should increase reimbursement rates so that rural hospitals aren't going broke serving patients and expand the services that are eligible for Medicaid reimbursement so that things like case management and crisis response can be expanded across the state to give everyone access. I'll fight to give every American the choice of joining Medicare, along with an increase and renewal of ACA subsidies to make that free healthcare for every working-class person in this country. Nobody should go broke to afford healthcare, and we shouldn't force people into private insurance companies' broken system any longer.

**Ray Curtis (Rep)****Age:** 65**Location:** Turah**Education:** Both BA and Master's in US Constitutional history from the University of Montana**Occupation:** semi-retired American Government Teacher**Contact information:** hireray4mt.com, hireray4mt@gmail.com

1. I recall learning forty years ago from K Ross Toole that Montana has what other places have lost: beautiful, clean space with a quality of life. To keep "the quiet beauty of our state" development must be responsible and with the long-term consequences considered. The states constitution requires we



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

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maintain a clean and healthful environment. Additionally, Montana communities ought to have a say in developing in a way acceptable to them. I think representatives need to listen to the people who live here. Keep in mind, this is more for future generations than the present ones. Too many times, I fear that we have neglected what our young people are going to inherit from us for short term gain. We absolutely do not want to lose what has been lost elsewhere and “turn our blessing into a curse.” I firmly believe we can achieve a balance between conservation and development by working together and remembering what is special about this place we call home.

2. It has become even more expensive here

because Montana has been discovered as a desirable place to live. It is getting harder and harder for someone from here to stay here. Homeownership is out of reach for many Montanans. The average age of a first-time homebuyer in the U.S. is now 40 years old, which is the oldest on record. Additionally, the median age of all homebuyers is now 59 years. One possible solution to bring down home prices and make ownership more feasible might be to manipulate supply through taxes. Taxes is an unpopular word, but they are used to manipulate all kinds of behavior such as charitable giving, or sin-taxes on alcohol and tobacco. Other nations tax gasoline at a much higher rate to encourage the use of

more fuel-efficient cars. Perhaps taxes could be used to limit the number of homes and properties a person can accumulate. Discouraging the purchase of home after home, so others can have an affordable place to live, seems like a desirable goal.

3. The US Constitution grants Congress the expressed power to declare war. In the cases of Iran and Venezuela it is clear why the Framers did this, so that one individual could not unilaterally take our nation to war, especially one which is not a national emergency. The Framers wanted to ensure our presidents did not have the power of kings. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 was only passed because past presidents tried to abuse their authority.

Congress can, and should, use the “power of the purse” to pull funding and leverage their constitutional authority. The Resolution in question does not need to be discarded, but instead utilized, and quickly. Congress has ceded its exclusive constitutional powers too frequently in the past year. Our country desperately needs representatives who are devoted to their constitutional duties and the people they serve, rather than automatically falling in line with the president.

4. This issue is being discussed in my community right now! Development of data centers is not impossible but, thankfully, local political leaders considered first the people most impacted, thus requiring new data centers to

produce their own NEW energy so residential consumers won't see their rates go up as a result. Those data centers are also forbidden from being built near residential areas and thus negatively impact the people who live nearby. Montana has a lot of open space for clean development. A key question is how much water might be available? This question can't be flatly answered for all areas; it has to be looked at from a local perspective and current environmental perspective. Data centers require review, they might simply not have what they need because of existing residential, agricultural, environmental, and recreational needs. For example, is predicted that stream runoff this year will be a fraction of normal. Water is limited resource.

5. It disturbs me that the "big, beautiful bill" adds trillions to our \$39 trillion national debt, a debt we are passing on to future generations to take care of. It only took five months to add the last trillion whereas it took 200 years to add the first. Nearly \$1 trillion now is going to be spent on the military, three times as much as what China spends. Like President Eisenhower, I believe out of control military spending takes away from "promoting the general welfare" of we the people. I believe one of the fundamental purposes of government is to help people who need help, plain and simple, without contemplating anything else about them except that they are humans who need help. Montanans are pretty good about that. We've all helped push another person's car out of a snowy ditch a time or two. I'd like to bring this ethos of Montanans to congress and apply the "All men are created equal" mentality at a larger scale. We ought to, and we can, make people's lives better. Everyone's.



### Albert D. Olszewski MD (Rep)



**Age:** 63

**Location:** Kalispell

**Education:** Charles M Russell high school, Great Falls MT, Carroll College-Helena MT, University of Washington Medical School, USAF Wilford Hall Medical Center

for Surgical internship and Orthopedic Surgical residency, University of Texas Health Science Center for Sports Medicine/Total Joint fellowship.

**Occupation:** Independent orthopedic surgeon

**Contact information:** [alformontana.com](http://alformontana.com)

1. I believe in balanced use of all our public lands. Western Montana has bountiful federal lands that can sustain active use for multiple use recreation, active forest management, and resource development. We will continue to protect our wilderness ar-



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Voters wait in line on Nov. 5 at the Montana ExpoPark in Great Falls, Mont.

eas. Those wilderness study areas that have failed to be designated wilderness needs to be returned to multiple use lands. Federal forests and mineral deposits are part of Montana's treasure. They need to be harvested and mined in a 21st century sustainable and environmentally safe way to create high paying jobs for Montanans, and provide royalties to Western Montana counties to pay their fair share in lieu of property taxes to support roads, public school and infrastructure.

2. Western Montana is expensive. Congress can help make Montana more affordable in two ways. Employ Montanans through opening our federal lands to natural resource development. Timber and mining jobs provide high paying salaries that make it affordable to pay a house mortgage. Robust timber harvesting results in high supply of building materials which lowers their cost. The second way Congress can help Montanans is through inexpensive energy. Cheap energy is the secret to making Montana affordable.

It affects the cost of food prices, transportation, heating in the winter, and the cost of building homes. These two mechanisms, in conjunction with State and local efforts will help address affordability in Western Montana.

3. I do not like the war in Iran and I support our President in his decision of military action in Iran and Venezuela. I believe the President has more information than the public concerning the Iranian and Venezuela threats to the American people. Fighting foreign wars fails my Montana First Agenda by driving up the costs of energy, food, and medicines. I believe that Congress does need to debate a 21st century vision of clawing back their constitutional powers that have been eroded or forfeited to the executive branch. That includes the 1973 War Powers Act. The timing of this debate and a vote to rescind or modify the 1973 War Powers Act is when our country is not involved in major military actions, not during them. Based on

the start of the Iranian war as 02/28/2026, Congress will need to authorize approval of continued war authority by 04/29/2026, or our President will have to withdraw from our military engagement with Iran per the 1973 War Powers Act.

4. I do not support the development of Artificial Intelligence Data Centers in Western Montana. The energy consumption and water use will required by these projects will hurt Montanans by driving up the cost of electricity, and water usage. In addition artificial intelligence programs will put Montanans who work in high paying white collar occupations out of a job. The elimination of these jobs will make Montana unaffordable to many families. AI data centers in Western Montana are more likely to hurt Montana families than to help them. This is one issue I hope we can all say, No to data center development in Montana.

5. I support the main provisions of the One Big Beautiful Act and their impact on

Medicaid Expansion. The first key change to Medicaid Expansion is work requirements. The second key change is required eligibility verification every six months. The third key change is requiring increased fees for people who receive medicaid expansion, who make more money than the federal poverty level. We have these requirements in our Montana laws already. As a State Senator in the 2019 legislature, I voted for these provisions and they passed the House, senate and the Governor.



### HOUSE DISTRICT 15

*Note: Both candidates for HD 15 Thedis Crowe and Adrien Wagner, did not respond to this questionnaire.*



### HOUSE DISTRICT 76

*Note: One candidate for HD 76, Trish Schreiber (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.*

#### John S. Fitzpatrick (Rep)



**Age:** 77  
**Location:** Georgetown Lake in Deer Lodge County  
**Education:** BA, University of MT; MA and Ph.D. Ohio State University  
**Occupation:** State Legislator and co-owner of a real estate development company

**Contact information:** Email: John.Fitzpatrick@legmt.gov Phone: 406-459-8407 Facebook: John Fitzpatrick for HD 76 Website: fitzfor76.com

**1.** During the past two sessions, I took the lead in acquiring funds to up-grade Montana's Correctional system, invest in the State Hospital at Warm Springs, and fund local government infrastructure projects. That will be my principal focus in the 2027 legislature as well.

**2.** Reducing state general fund expenditures is very difficult because about 80% of that funding is in three program areas--education, corrections, and as matching funds for social service and income maintenance programs. At this point I do not anticipate any large reduction in state services. The Legislature has access to tools to craft a balanced budget without limiting services, most notably by adjusting budgetary inflation rates and by transferring funds from state savings accounts which were prudently created several years ago to deal with potential

revenue shortfalls. For example, the Budget Stabilization Reserve Fund has a balance of over \$500 million.

**3.** I supported passage of HB 231 and SB 542 in the last session. Those bills provided property tax relief to over 92% of the homeowners in HD 76. I have received numerous comments of appreciation and very few complaints about the legislation. Looking forward, I would be willing to re-examine the assessment rates established for second homes.

**4.** Yes. Bear populations have steadily increased and they are present throughout HD 76. In my opinion, the grizzly needs to be managed as a game animal in the future.

**5.** NO!!! ABSOLUTELY NO! The sales tax is very hard on middle and working class families. If a sales tax is ever to be implemented in Montana, it should be done by a vote of the people and constructed to reduce property taxes.



#### Shayne Morgan (Ind)



**Age:** 54  
**Location:** Deer Lodge  
**Education:** Montana Tech, Carroll College, Chemeketa Community College  
**Occupation:** President of Montana Information Security and Maintenance Technician for Montana Fish

Wildlife & Parks Warm Springs  
**Contact information:** www.morganformontana.com

**1.** My top priority, if elected, is to protect Montana's lands from outside and corporate interests. That means preserving public access, safeguarding working ranches and farms, and ensuring that local communities, not out-of-state investors, have a voice in how land is used. I will support policies that keep Montana's landscapes in the hands of Montanans, protect natural resources for future generations, and maintaining the state's outdoor heritage and way of life.

**2.** We need to take a hard common sense approach to the budget. Is there programs we can consolidate to balance the budget? What administrative fees can we cut without cutting vital services? Is their duplicate spending in education and health services that can be re-organized. We also need to plan for more shortfalls with rising fuel costs and the rising price of goods to run Montana government efficiently and effectively.

**3.** Yes, I will support revisiting Montana's property tax reforms as there are some significant issues that need to be addressed on secondary homes and short-term rentals as these dwellings had sharp increases in taxation. Some of these are family homes that

were purchased decades ago or inherited before Montana real estate market values increased. Many of these secondary homes have been in families for generations and they are seeing massive tax increases to lower and middle class Montanan's.

**4.** Yes, but only with strict guardrails in place. Returning management to the state is a necessity to effectively manage the grizzly population. State wildlife agencies need a cohesive, well-defined plan and the authority to address problem bears, including those that prey on livestock or have lost their fear of humans. Clear quotas should be established, along with a comprehensive strategy for responding to conflicts in coordination with ranchers and the public. There needs to be clear and concise communication plan among all stakeholders in grizzly management.

**5.** I do not support a statewide sales tax in the upcoming legislative session. With rising fuel costs and higher grocery prices, it would place an added burden on Montana families. As of March 17, 2026, Powell County alone has \$634,442.06 in outstanding property tax debt, which underscores the financial strain many residents are already facing. Adding a sales tax at this time would only increase that pressure on families, who are already stretched to their limits by rising costs.



### HOUSE DISTRICT 85

*Note: One candidate for HD 85, Kim Dailey (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.*

#### Michele Binkley (Rep)



**Age:** 57  
**Location:** Hamilton, MT  
**Education:** After a few years in college, I couldn't afford to finish. I have spent the last 3 decades learning the value of hard work and on-the-job training, which is why I support expanding

vocational training and trades programs in our schools.

**Occupation:** I work as a Consumer Loan Processor at First Security Bank in downtown Hamilton. During my time in the legislature, I found it was rare to meet other legislators who were still working full-time jobs. It helps me legislate from experience and prioritize bills that make life more affordable and lower taxes for everyday Montanans.

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1. If I'm lucky enough to return to the legislature in 2027, my number one priority will be protecting the property tax relief passed in 2025 that lowered property taxes for 80% of Montanans, including my own family.

2. The Montana Legislative Fiscal Division does project expenses will overtake revenue, but the decision of what to downsize, cut, or shift, should not be made prior to the session. Legislators need to discuss the most up to date information presented by the non partisan agencies, and that only happens during the session. Coming into Helena with a shortlist of agencies to cut is making an ideological point, not smart governance. I am dedicated to downsizing bureaucracy and government where we can, keeping our budget balanced, and finding ways to make government more efficient to spend taxpayer dollars wisely while protecting critical services.

3. The property tax relief provided by the 2025 legislature was badly needed - and nearly 80% of Montanans have benefited from lower property taxes because of it. I do think we need to revisit a provision of HB 231 that raised taxes on large apartment buildings, which can have a domino effect of raising rents for working Montanans.

4. The facts are that it is possible to delist bears and regulate their hunting, which would produce revenue for the state. It is also a fact that hunting them will not solve any of the problems that bear de-listers are worried about, namely bear attacks on humans and livestock. Bears are already dying at a pretty fast clip - 77 of them died in Yellowstone in 2024 alone, mostly from avoidable human contact. Human contact with bear territory is only going to increase, and de-listing grizzlies won't solve that. I would vote for de-listing if it came my way, but I would push for amendments that increased the monitoring capacity of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. My constituents, the residents of Ravalli County, are hunters and anglers and I will always prioritize my constituents over special interests. We need to make sure we're funding our own agencies enough to allow for ethical and sustainable hunting in a manner that keeps populations strong and keeps Montana fiscally responsible.

5. I do not support a statewide sales tax. Despite what people say about a sales tax capturing money from mostly tourists, it's a burden that would fall almost entirely on working people like myself. It's already difficult to make ends meet - lawmakers need to find solutions that make Montana affordable



## HOUSE DISTRICT 86

*Note: One candidate for HD 86, Kenneth Allen (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.*



### Wayne Rusk (Rep)

**Age:** 56  
**Location:** Corvallis  
**Education:** High school  
**Occupation:** Self-employed tradesman  
**Contact information:** WayneRusk.com. 406-370-8486

1. It is to preserve, protect, and defend our constitutional system of government. I'm speaking here of the fundamentals such as the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the integrity of our elected officials. These are the core principals and the common ground upon which we all rely as well as the only firm foundation from which to adjust our differences. They are that which sets true representation apart from mere activism and what keeps principles clear of unwarranted partisanship.

2. To clarify, all services provided by the state ought to be essential to one degree or another, and required to justify their appropriations on those grounds. From our police and fire departments to the humanitarian safety nets that catch the unfortunate and work to return them to productivity, government's role (the cornerstone of which is the constitution) is the same as the oath we take to it; to preserve, protect and defend—life, liberty, and property. This must then fit within the budget we have to work with. I would answer the question along these lines as the options take shape.

3. I do. Tax reform of the magnitude effected last session is not a 'hole in one'. More likely a par 3—maybe more. Some patience is in order as the saddle of taxation is adjusted so as not to gall one bracket or another. Broad relief was achieved—to the extent that it could be—in that we all hang our hat under one roof (homestead act). This I support, but would gladly work to address the implications it had in other places.

4. I do, and here's why. Data, science and experience all conspire to indicate that these regal beasts are thriving—consistent with their reclusive nature and to the extent that our wilderness haunts can accommodate them. Beyond this they are out of their element—and we put out of ours. Delisting also eliminates the temptation of some to use the ESA to impede the urgent forest management critical to the health of both the flora and fauna of the Mountain West. The bears are not the problem. It is rather the onerous train of needless regulation they have come to carry with them.

5. I recently attended the 2026 Economic Seminar where this question figured promi-

nently among the topics. I had reservations about a sales tax when I arrived, and left with the same. The idea of exporting a portion of our tax burden to the 15 million visitors we annually entertain sounds good. Upon inspection, however, data shows nonresident visitors would only pay around 12% of it.

Another aspect of the debate is the regressive nature of a sales tax. This simply means that it tends to fall harder on lower end of the economic spectrum than the higher, as illustrated by the parable of the "widow's mite". In sum, it is a complex equation and remains a tough sell—by either side of the aisle.



## HOUSE DISTRICT 90

*Note: One candidate for HD 90, Kelley Durbin-Williams (Ind), did not participate in this questionnaire*



### Jeff Stanek (Rep)

**Age:** 37  
**Location:** St. Regis  
**Education:** Bachelors in history and secondary education from the University of Montana Western, Masters in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University  
**Occupation:** Social Studies Teacher  
**Contact information:** stanekforhd90.com, jstanek.mt@gmail.com

1. Lower taxes, especially property taxes and decrease the size of government.

2. Discretionary spending on things like the arts, community development, "green" initiatives or "research" should be the first to go. After that, we should look at the waste of tax dollars within government departments and go from there. Ultimately, voters need to decide what they believe the purpose and role of government is in their lives with regards to their money. Two years ago we had a 2.5 billion dollar surplus of tax money, the funding for government is already in excess.

3. I would support repealing HB 231 and SB 542. I would also support a lower, flat rate property tax that is not based on imaginary market appraisal values.

4. Absolutely. We need to treat those monsters like any other game species and allow hunters to ethically and responsibly harvest griz to manage their populations. We hunters are the apex predators and the best option for keeping game populations under control.

5. No way. Look at all the other examples of states who have enacted a sales tax. It is always with the promise that it will help us homeowners who are paying high property taxes or high income tax. However, because

the nature of government is to grow in size, history shows that those taxes will increase incrementally and eventually we will be like all the other states in the union who have been taken over by big government. If there was a budget surplus last go around, we do not need any new taxes.



### Curtis Cochran (Rep)



**Age:** 69  
**Location:** St. Regis  
**Education:** University of Montana, Green River College  
**Occupation:** Semi-Retired. Background: Ag, Timber, Construction.  
**Contact information:**

<https://www.cochranformontana.com>,  
<https://www.facebook.com/cochranformt>

1. My number one priority if re-elected is to use my experience gained from my first session and continue to focus on representing my district first. Rural Western Montana communities have our own unique issues like rural fire, public safety, rural health and small town schools that often differ from urban areas and Eastern Montana.

2. The good news is Montana is better prepared for this moment than any time in recent memory, because we planned for it. Working with the Governor, we built up reserves and established the Growth and Opportunity Trust during the good years specifically for times like this. It's the hay we put up before winter. The GO Trust also gives us additional tools to help rural priorities without growing the size of our government. As for cuts, we should first find efficiencies and eliminate duplication in government and then take a hard look at programs that fall outside core government responsibilities. Montanans live within their means when times get tight, and government should do the same. The advantage of having saved during the good years is that we get to trim rather than cut to the bone, protecting the essential services that rural districts like ours depend on.

3. Residential property tax relief is something I'm really proud to have delivered for Montana last session. It means that more of our hard earned dollars can stay in our pockets. Looking forward, I want to keep finding ways to save Montanans money while protecting services we depend on like rural public safety, fire and first responders and infrastructure like roads and bridges. There is a proposed initiative that Senator Galt is working on to cap property tax increases that may work well with the Homestead Act.

4. Yes, I support the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Statewide Grizzly Bear Management Plan that was released in 2024. The release

of the plan wrapped up an extensive public process analyzing how the state intends to manage the iconic species while it is still federally protected and after it is turned over to state management.

**5.** Absolutely not. Montanans need tax relief, not more tax burden. Growing up in rural Montana, I learned that your word is your bond, and I've made a promise to voters that I'd find ways to lower taxes. I'm not about to renege on that promise.



## HOUSE DISTRICT 91

*Note: One candidate for HD 91, Rustin Bielski (Dem), did not participate in this questionnaire.*

### Shelly R Fyant (Dem)



**Age:** 68

**Location:** Arlee, MT

**Education:** B.S. in Business Administration, University of Montana

**Occupation:** Legislator. Food Truck/Catering coming soon!

**Contact information:**

shellyformontana.com shellyformontana@gmail.com 406-546-5633

**1.** Defining, strengthening and implementing Tribal Consultation, providing awareness of Tribal Sovereignty and the relationship between Tribes, the Federal Government and the State of Montana.

**2.** I believe this is a false narrative. Creating efficiencies, streamlining processes and stop giving tax breaks to corporations and rich people are critically necessary to provide essential services to our most vulnerable populations. Creating a fair tax system is paramount. There is money in the budget; it's a matter of making choices to provide basic services, i.e. healthcare, childcare, law enforcement, education, roads, access to housing and food. Montana values have dictated those priorities for decades.

**3.** I absolutely support revisiting MT's property tax reforms from the 2025 session. While the bills were a bipartisan effort of negotiations between legislative leadership, there is more work to be done. Currently the lion's share of property taxes is on the backs of residential property owners at 50.13%. Constituents across the State have indicated they may lose their homes due to increases they cannot afford in the current inflationary state we are in. There is plenty of room in the 16 property tax classifications for giving relief to Montana residential property owners. I specifically support carefully examining the railroad/airline tax rate of 2.64% and telecom/electric which currently enjoy a 4.38% rate.

**4.** I do not support grizzly bear delisting. Proponents cite "recovered" populations in the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide ecosystems, yet the Selway-Bitterroot, Cabinet-Yaak, Selkirk and Northern Cascades are not seeing these numbers or recovery goals. There remains a lack of natural connectivity and genetic exchange. Additionally, climate change is altering the grizzly's food sources and availability forcing bears to travel further. We must protect their diminished habitat and reduce human/bear conflict. This can only happen with increased collaboration between Federal, State, Tribal and private landowners.

**5.** I do not support a statewide sales tax. My constituents are struggling to put food on the table, pay mortgages or rent, car payments, insurance, utilities, childcare, and healthcare. Add a sales tax to the mix and more families will be choosing between these basic essentials, i.e. food and utilities. Many single income families are already doing this. Grandparents on fixed incomes raising grandchildren and multi-generational housing situations are a reality for many Montanans. Let us create a fair tax system, taking the burden off of residential property owners, stop with the tax breaks for the rich and distribute the burden among the current lowest paying tax classifications.



## HOUSE DISTRICT 92

### Monica Tranel (Dem)



**Age:** 59

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** Law degree

**Occupation:** Attorney

**Contact information:**

<https://monicatranel.com>,

<https://substack.com/@montanaconnections>,

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[@monicatranelforHD92](https://www.facebook.com/monicatranelforHD92), [@monicatranel.bsky.social](https://www.facebook.com/monicatranelforHD92)

**1.** Affordability – housing, healthcare, education.

**2.** First, stop the self-inflicted wounds. HB 337 started at the top, cutting revenues by giving the wealthiest a tax break while working families are struggling to fill their car's gas tank and pay for a place to call home. We cannot have the services we need if everyone doesn't pay their fair share. Essential services like childcare, decent jobs, healthcare and education will be my focus. Also we can fine Texans and Californians who can't drive in the snow.

**3.** Yes.

**4.** I support public access and use of public

lands. Grizzly listing is a federal issue.

**5.** No.



### Reggie Spaulding (Dem)



**Age:** 58

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** B.S Microbiology (Idaho State University), M.S. Genetics and Development (Columbia University), PhD, Environmental Chemistry (University of California, Davis), Professional

Certificate in Sustainability (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

**Occupation:** Research and development of scientific instrumentation

**Contact information:** web: reggiespauldingformt.org, email: reggiespauldingformt@gmail.com, phone: 406-830-9079

**1.** My number one priority is to make Montana more affordable by changing the income tax structure (to a progressive tax that helps low and middle income earners), and helping Montana families with healthcare insurance, childcare expenses, and school lunches.

**2.** The budget deficit is a manufactured problem that is caused by the change to a nearly flat income tax structure that punishes low income earners, while reducing taxation on the rich. Meanwhile Montana's bridges and highways are crumbling, schools are in need of repair, teachers cannot be retained, and rural healthcare facilities are in danger of closing due to low funding from both the state and the federal government. Rather than cutting services that will further punish lower income earners, I would return to a progressive tax structure with some changes to the tax brackets. I propose an income tax structure where individuals earning less than \$20k pay no income tax, and the highest income tax bracket would be \$650k (the wealthiest 1% of Montanans) with a 15% tax.

**3.** Yes. The newest property tax bill had good intentions and lowered property tax for many people I have talked with. However, it was a complex bill and has had some consequences that were likely not intended. For example, a high tax burden has been put on families with cabins in areas where the land value is inflated, even if the value of the structure on the land is not high. I think that some changes could be made to the bill to help Montana families keep their cabins. Alternatively, I would support keeping the property tax in place, but sending refunds to Montana families through their income taxes, where out-of-state owners would have to pay the high tax rate.

**4.** No. If grizzly bears are delisted federally, they will be under state management which is not ideal for several reasons:

**1)** There are 6 recovery zones for the grizzly bear, and they have only reached recovery goals in 2 of those zones (Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide.

**2)** If delisted, the grizzly would be managed differently by different states (e.g. WA, OR, MT, ID, WY), but the grizzly need large land ranges to survive, and need to cross state boundaries to avoid problems with genetic isolation. It is better to have a consistent management plan across states.

**3)** The grey wolf was delisted in 2020, with states taking over management. State management has resulted in more hunting and a significant decrease in population. Although MT and WY currently have solid grizzly conservation plans, the fate of the grizzly bear might be similar to the wolves if state management plans change.

**5.** No, I do not support a sales tax. Sales tax disproportionately affects individuals with low income, as wealthier people spend a smaller percentage of their income buying things, especially necessities like food and gas. I think the better way for the state to earn income is through a progressive income tax structure described above.



## HOUSE DISTRICT 93

### Ben Davis (Dem)



**Age:** 50

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** Bachelor of Science, Georgetown University; Master of Arts, University of Chicago; Juris Doctorate, Catholic University of America

**Occupation:** Non-Profit Executive Director of Friends of the Children-

Western Montana and Business Owner of Workforce Housing Investment Firm

**Contact information:** Website: [davisformontana.com](https://www.davisformontana.com); Email: [ben@davisformontana.com](mailto:ben@davisformontana.com); Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Ben-Davis-for-Montana/61585246460709/>; Tel: 406-550-0017

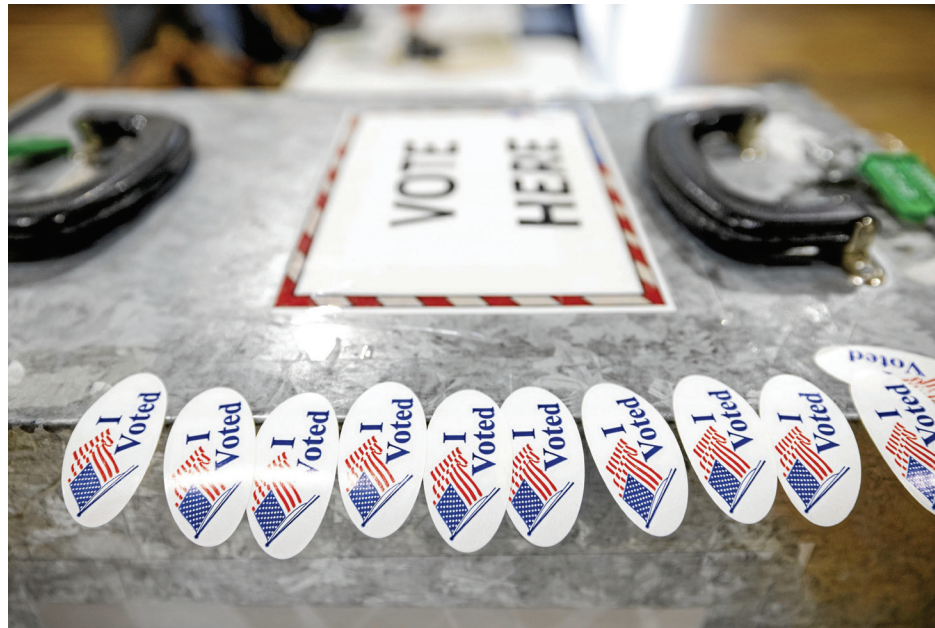
**1.** My number one priority in the Montana Legislature will be improving housing affordability. I will support investments in infrastructure (water, sewer, roads) for larger workforce housing projects that will improve the supply of housing and bring costs down. I will work to ensure that we fully fund the housing trust fund and maintain low-interest credit facilities to support the development of new workforce housing. I also want to reduce barriers to home ownership by creating the Montana Dream account, a pre-tax savings and investment account for home down pay-

ments. I will also propose a new homeowner and workforce housing tax credit to support first-time homeowners and low and middle-income earners with the transition to home ownership. I also support our local elected officials in implementing zoning code reforms that will improve housing density and expand the supply of workforce housing.

**2.** Before we begin looking at significant budget cuts, we need to take a step back and make some commonsense choices about ways we can diversify our revenue streams in Montana. Montanans deserve a responsive and efficient government that effectively maintains our roads and infrastructure, properly funds our schools and pays our teachers competitively, and provides critical services for our most vulnerable. Budget cuts aren't the place to start. Instead, we need a more fair and equitable income tax structure that doesn't unfairly benefit the wealthiest Montanans while leaving working people to foot the bill. In addition to implementing a range of tourism-related revenue sources, we should adopt a luxury goods tax on high end items (boats, RVs, cars, planes) being purchased in Montana to avoid sales tax. I will also champion efficient government by tightening property tax loopholes on trophy ranches that aren't being used for allowable purposes, and root out other waste and fraud.

**3.** Yes, I support revisiting the 2025 property tax legislation. While the 2025 reforms did help to reduce property taxes for most primary residences, which we must preserve in any future reforms, the law has harshly penalized some small businesses and multi-family housing owners and is adversely impacting their bottom lines. In some cases, these increased costs are being passed on to consumers and tenants with higher prices based on conversations I have had with business owners. The law also severely penalizes second homes, more than 70% of which are owned by Montana families as generational cabins and weekend retreats. I've spoken to numerous voters who are being forced to sell their family properties due to the tax increases. We need tax and revenue solutions that prioritize new revenues from the most significant economic sectors, like tourism, versus picking specific categories of property owners as winners and losers in our property tax system.

**4.** No, I do not support grizzly bear delisting at the present time. While the Grizzly population in Montana and neighboring states continues to grow, the State of Montana must comply with the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the United States Forest Service Roadless Rule, to ensure the Grizzly population and its habitat is protected and that any proposed delisting is supported by thorough scientific review and sign off by the federal government. More broadly, we must protect our public lands



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

I Voted stickers available for voters in Cascade, Mont. on Nov. 5.

from efforts to soften wilderness and roadless rule requirements and stand up against efforts to sell off public lands to private buyers. Montana is not for sale!

**5.** No, I do not support a statewide sales tax. There are other new sources of revenue that we can prioritize without creating another tax burden for all Montanans who are already feeling squeezed by increases in housing, food, and energy costs. I support making the wealthiest Montanans pay their fair share of income taxes, creating new targeted taxes on tourism-related activities like hotel rooms and rental cars, and adopting a luxury goods tax on high end luxury items like sports cars, RVs, planes, and boats.



**Nick Kujawa (Dem)**

**Age:** 47

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** Butte High School Diploma (1996); University of Montana, Missoula (2000): B.A. in Physics, with Honors, University Scholar & B.A. in Philosophy, University Scholar;



New York University School of Law (2004): J.D., magna cum laude,

**Occupation:** I am a builder and small business owner with a focus on restoring historic buildings and revitalizing Main Street Montana through thoughtful, sustainable, community-oriented development. Earlier in my career I practiced tax and real estate law, which continues to inform my work today. I have also been appointed by both Governors Schweitzer and Bullock to serve

on Montana State boards concerning workforce investment, economic development, and historic preservation.

**Contact information:** [www.kujawa4montana.com](http://www.kujawa4montana.com); [kujawa4montana@gmail.com](mailto:kujawa4montana@gmail.com); 406-285-1615

**1.** Property tax relief. People are worried about losing their homes. We need a system that is fair and predictable. My focus is keeping Montanans in the communities they built.

**2.** Start with discipline, not cuts. We should review programs for waste and duplication before cutting core services. Public safety, schools, and health care come first. The goal is smarter spending, not weaker communities.

**3.** Yes. The 2025 reforms were a step in the right direction, but the process was too hurried and resulted in many unanticipated impacts that need to be fixed.

**4.** The ultimate goal of the federal Endangered Species Act is to recover species to the point where they no longer need protection. Grizzly bears in some locations may be recovered whereas other distinct population segments may still be endangered. A blanket delisting of all grizzly bear populations right now is premature and driven more by politics than science. Courts have already found past efforts failed to address long-term genetic health and broader population impacts, and many experts warn that isolated populations remain at risk. I'm also concerned about bypassing tribal input and limiting public and judicial review. We should follow the science and ensure long-term recovery before removing all federal protections.

**5.** No. Montanans have resoundingly rejected a sales tax again and again and again.

This is because we know that a sales tax shifts the tax burden onto working families and lets large corporations off the hook. We should fix the broken property and income tax system we have before creating a whole new one.



**Sam Kulla (Dem)**

**Age:** 42

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** BA double major in Geography and Spanish; MA in Education. Both degrees from UM in Missoula



**Occupation:** Laid-off / Recently Unemployed

**Contact information:** [VoteSamKulla.com](http://VoteSamKulla.com) – [VoteSamKulla@gmail.com](mailto:VoteSamKulla@gmail.com) – [@VoteSamKulla](https://www.instagram.com/VoteSamKulla) on Instagram

**1.** My number one priority is making sure Montanans have a stable foundation with quality healthcare they can access, costs they can manage, and schools that work. Not because the other issues don't matter, but because you can't fight for public lands, climate, or anything else when you're struggling with healthcare or working three jobs just to get by. Healthy, educated people who feel secure are the prerequisite for solving everything else on the list. That's where I start.

**2.** Before we talk cuts, we should talk about who's paying their fair share. Montana hosts millions of tourists every year and increasingly attracts out-of-state investment, yet our tax structure doesn't capture that economic activity as well as it could. How about closing loopholes for out-of-state companies doing business here, having extractive industries pay royalties commensurate with the value of what they're taking, and making sure visitors contribute to the infrastructure they depend on. These are all conversations we need to have before we ask Montanans to give up more services they depend on. That said, the structural gap is real, and when cuts are necessary, I'd start with administrative overhead and contracting, where budget bloat tends to hide without touching people directly, rather than cutting the direct services that keep people healthy, housed, and educated.

**3.** Yes. Two at least two things need fixing. First, property taxes should be frozen for Montanans on fixed incomes. Retirees on Social Security shouldn't be priced out of homes they've owned for decades just because their neighborhood got more valuable. Second, the second home tax could use some nuance. A rustic family cabin passed down over generations shouldn't be taxed the same as a luxury second home, as a measure of protecting people and heritage.

**4.** Not anymore. A few years ago I would

have said yes, but delisting only works if the state managing the bear can be trusted to do so responsibly. Montana's legislature and governor have spent recent sessions passing aggressive, indiscriminate predator-killing policies driven by politics rather than science. You can't hand management authority to a state that has systematically sidelined its own wildlife professionals. I'll support delisting the day Montana proves it has a management plan whose goal is coexistence, not elimination.

**5.** Hard no. A sales tax is regressive by design. It hits the rancher and the restaurant worker harder than the out-of-state landlord or the corporate executive just passing through, and once it's in place it never goes away, it only goes up. Montana has untapped revenue right in front of us, like remote employers headquartered elsewhere who pay their Montana workers a lower rate while avoiding meaningful state tax exposure, and a development pattern that sprawls low-density across buildable land instead of capturing more taxable value per acre with less sprawl. We don't need to add a new tax when people are already struggling to get by, and we still haven't finished making the existing system work. And frankly, if something costs five bucks, it should cost five bucks.



## HOUSE DISTRICT 94

### Lisa Verlanic Fowler (Dem)



**Age:** 55

**Location:** Missoula

**Education:** I have a B.A. in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

**Occupation:** I am a retired elementary education teacher.

**Contact information:** My website is montanansforlisa.com. My email is montanansforlisa@gmail.com. My phone number is 406-239-8718. My campaign Facebook page is Montanans For Lisa.

**1.** If I am elected to the Montana Legislature, my number one priority is to advocate for the adequate funding of Montana's public schools. Over my 30 years of teaching in Florence, MT, I have witnessed first-hand the ramifications of the lack of sufficient financial support for our schools. In my opinion, public schools are the greatest equalizer we have for the success of our Montana children. The students of today are the future workers of tomorrow. We must invest in our teachers, school support staff and educational facilities

to be able to fulfill the promise of our Montana Constitution; a free and quality education for all Montana students.

**2.** I believe the Montana Legislature and the governor need to ensure any bills that are unconstitutional must not be passed into law. Our state tax dollars should not be used for fighting lawsuits against these sorts of bills. Using our natural resources such as solar and wind power can be used to reduce utility costs. I am also researching the cost of our correctional programs, and I am very concerned about the money we are spending by sending Montana inmates to out of state facilities. If we use our tax money wisely, we shouldn't have to make cuts to our essential services like schools, healthcare, police officers, firefighters, emergency services, infrastructure, and transportation.

**3.** I am in favor of keeping the "Homestead Act" which was a large part of the property tax reforms from the 2025 session. I believe that revisiting the property tax reforms can be a good idea, as long as our legislators are evaluating the benefits of the tax reforms and any changes must improve the financial quality of life for our residents. Safe housing is a basic human right. Our elderly residents shouldn't have to fear losing their home because their property taxes are cost prohibitive.

**4.** I do not support grizzly bear delisting.

Grizzly bear survival depends on the food resources available to them. Weather fluctuations greatly determine the output of food for grizzly bears and if there's one thing we know in Montana, we can't count on the weather. Montana has become a very popular state. I believe the encroachment in lands where the grizzlies roam will only continue to grow in the future. Grizzly bears inhabit only a fraction of land where they previously roamed. Nature will adapt, protect and grow the grizzly bear population as nature sees fit.

**5.** I do not support a statewide sales tax. First of all, the voices of our Montana citizens have been loud and clear. For 50 years, voters have overwhelmingly rejected a statewide sales tax. Furthermore, according to the Montana Budget and Policy Center, 88% of a statewide sales tax would be paid by our Montana residents which would negatively impact our residents that fall into low-income and moderate-income earners. Many of our residents are already struggling to make ends meet due to high grocery costs, rising gas prices and the high cost of living. If only 12% of the revenue gained from a sales tax comes from non-residents and the fact that a sales tax would be capped at 4%, the sales tax would not generate enough income to significantly reduce property taxes for our Montana residents.



*Elect*  
**Wayne Rusk**  
*FOR LEGISLATURE*  
*Republican - House District 86*

- Constitutional Conservative
- Civil, Respectful, Thoughtful
- Principles Over Partisanship



As multiple generation Montanans, my family and I cherish our way of life here in the Bitterroot Valley.

As your Representative, I will again bring our common values and conservative principles to the challenges we face in Ravalli County.

Even as hyper-partisanship continues to divide our ranks and undermine our positions, I have stood for common ground such as the rule of law and the separation of powers. These are core principles upon which our liberties ultimately depend, and the only firm foundation from which to adjust our differences.

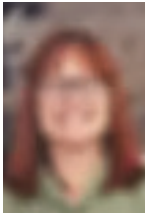
The sacred right of self-government belongs to the people - not to the parties.

**Vote Wayne Rusk June 2nd.**



Visit [WayneRusk.com](http://WayneRusk.com) | 1 (406) 370-8486 | [RuskforMontana@gmail.com](mailto:RuskforMontana@gmail.com)

Paid for by Rusk for Legislator, Carrie Rusk Treasurer, P.O. Box 531 Corvallis, MT 59828

**Robin Kendall (Dem)****Age:** 55**Location:** Missoula**Education:** Music Education & Performance**Occupation:** Director of Outbound Sales – ALPS**Contact information:** robinkendall4montana@gmail.com

**1.** My number one priority is supporting working families, starting with housing affordability. This is the issue I'm hearing about more than anything else when I'm out knocking doors. People are working hard, doing everything right, and still struggling to afford housing, child care, health care, and basic necessities. That's not sustainable for families or for our communities.

If elected, I'll focus on practical, common-sense solutions: increasing housing supply in a responsible way, supporting workforce housing, improving access to child care and health care, and making sure our policies actually help people get ahead, not fall further behind. At the end of the day, this is about making sure working families in Montana have a fair shot at stability, opportunity, and the ability to build a life in the communities they call home.

**2.** Montana needs a disciplined, thoughtful approach, not across-the-board cuts that weaken essential services. My priority is to protect core services like education, public safety, infrastructure, and health care while improving efficiency and accountability. I would start by reviewing tax expenditures and subsidies to ensure they deliver real economic value. If they're not creating jobs or benefiting Montanans, they should be re-evaluated. We should also streamline state operations by modernizing systems, reducing duplication, and improving how services are delivered.

I support prioritizing preventative investments, like health care, behavioral health, and housing that reduce long-term costs. New spending should be carefully evaluated for sustainability, with clear fiscal oversight. Finally, we must avoid shifting costs to local communities. Balancing the budget should not come at the expense of working families, but through smart, responsible governance.

**3.** Yes. I would support revisiting Montana's property tax reforms from the 2025 session. Democrats passed meaningful legislation aimed at providing relief, and that work matters but we're hearing from homeowners and renters that challenges remain.

Property taxes continue to be a top concern, especially as rising home values put pressure on working families and seniors on fixed incomes. Revisiting these reforms isn't about undoing progress. It's about making sure the policies are actually delivering the relief they were intended to provide. I'd support a data-driven review to

**THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD**

The Montana State Capitol in Helena, Mont.

identify what's working, where gaps exist, and how we can better target relief to those who need it most, while ensuring fairness and stability for local governments that rely on property tax revenue.

**4.** No, I do not support delisting grizzly bears at this time. Grizzly bears are an important part of Montana's ecosystem and cultural heritage, but their long-term recovery is not yet secure. Delisting should only happen when populations are fully sustainable, genetically connected, and have strong, enforceable management plans in place across state and federal lines.

We also have to recognize the real impacts on rural communities, ranchers, and public safety. That's why I support continued investment in conflict prevention like range riders, better carcass management, and compensation programs so we can reduce conflicts while maintaining protections. This doesn't have to be an either/or issue. We can protect grizzly bears and support the people who live and work on the land. But moving too quickly to delist without the right safeguards in place risks undoing decades of recovery work.

**5.** No. And the data backs that up. Recent polling shows that only about 33% of voters support a sales tax, even if it's used to reduce property taxes, while roughly 60% oppose it. That tells me people are concerned about shifting the tax burden, especially onto working families.

I share those concerns. Sales taxes tend to be regressive, meaning they hit lower- and mid-income households harder. In a time when

people are already struggling with the cost of living, I don't believe adding a new broad-based tax is the right approach. Instead, I believe we should focus on making our current tax system fairer and more effective—targeting relief where it's needed most, ensuring accountability, and not asking working families to carry more of the burden.

**SENATE DISTRICT 43**

*Note: One candidate for SD 43, Kathy Love (Rep), did not participate in this questionnaire.*

**David Bedey (Rep)****Age:** 71**Location:** Hamilton**Education:** B.S. Civil Engineering, Montana State University; M.A. in National Security and Strategic Studies, U.S. Naval War College; Ph.D. in Space Physics, University of Alaska Fairbanks**Occupation:** retired U.S. Army officer**Contact information:** 406-381-2059; d.f.bedey@gmail.com

**1.** I presently chair the School Funding Interim Commission, which is identifying opportunities to improve Montana's school system and is studying the adequacy of school funding across the state. My priority in the Senate would be to

find a way to make the findings of the commission a reality.

**2.** If spending cuts become necessary, it will require a thoughtful balancing of priorities across all state programs and agencies. My approach to such challenges is to reserve judgement until I have all the facts in front of me. But that said, one option would be to reduce the need for cuts by temporarily reducing the flow of revenue into the newly created Montana Growth and Opportunity Trust. This would allow more time for prudently revamping (or cutting) programs.

**3.** Yes. Although we have provided substantial relief for most Montana homeowners, I think that it is always a good idea to evaluate whether legislation can be improved. This is especially true of tax policy, which by its very nature is complex.

**4.** Yes. The state has met the recovery objectives set forth in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan" for formal delisting of the bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. I believe that the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is fully capable of responsibly managing and preserving grizzly populations in accordance with its "2024 Grizzly Management Plan."

**5.** I would only consider supporting a state-wide sales tax if its proceeds were used exclusively to reduce property taxes. This would best be accomplished by amending the Montana Constitution. That said, I do not think that most Montanans are ready for a sales tax.