

Montana GOP Rebukes ‘Out of Line Nine’ for Undermining Republican Control

Frustrated Voters Accuse Rogue Senators of Undermining Conservative Mandate

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The Out of Line Nine (from top left to bottom right): Jason Ellsworth (SD43), Wendy McKamey (SD12), Gayle Lammers (SD21), Josh Kassmier (SD13), Butch Gillespie (SD9), Gregg Hunter (SD15), Denley Loge (SD45), Russ Tempel (SD14), Shelley Vance (SD34). Photos: Montana Legislature.

As the Montana Legislature crosses the halfway mark of its 69th Legislative session, the Montana Republican Party (MTGOP) is publicly “rebuking” nine Republican state senators, widely referred to by frustrated Republican legislators and angry constituents as the “Out of Line Nine.” The GOP argues that these senators have frequently aligned with Democrats, effectively obstructing the Republican-controlled Legislature. The party asserts that Montana voters elected a strong Republican majority expecting governance that reflects their values and priorities.

Shift in Power: Republican Majority Undermined

Since the first day of the session, the MTGOP contends that these nine Republican senators have repeatedly partnered with the Democratic minority to overrule Republican leadership. The party argues that their actions have resulted in a de facto 27-23 Democratic majority, undermining the will of Montana voters, effectively handing control to Democrat Pat Flowers (SD31), Minority Leader in the Senate.

The influence of the nine has contributed to growing turmoil within the party, with internal disputes over leadership decisions, ethics complaints, and legislative priorities adding to the tension. The ongoing investigation by the Legislative Auditor into Sen. Jason Ellsworth (SD43), coupled with a separate ethics complaint introduced against Senate President Matt Regier (SD5), has further deepened divisions within the Republican caucus.

Who Are the ‘Out of Line Nine’?

The senators named in the state GOP’s statement are:

- Jason Ellsworth (SD43)
- Wendy McKamey (SD12)
- Gayle Lammers (SD21)
- Josh Kassmier (SD13)
- Butch Gillespie (SD9)
- Gregg Hunter (SD15)
- Denley Loge (SD45)
- Russ Tempel (SD14)
- Shelley Vance (SD34)

According to MTGOP leadership, these lawmakers have placed personal and political considerations above the broader priorities of their constituents, shifting power away from the Republican majority. The party called on them to realign with Republican governance and cease obstructing key legislative priorities or “the party will consider additional steps to address the situation,” the MTGOP said in a press release.

Conservative Leaders Speak Out

Sen. Theresa Manzella (SD44) weighed in on

the controversy, stating, “Constituents are angry. They sent us to Helena with a 32/18 majority. But due to the behavior of the Out of Line Nine, we have a 23/27 minority. We can’t hold them on ANYTHING—property taxes, refunding the \$2.3 billion surplus, judicial reform, parental reform, election integrity—we’re just along for the ride. Medicaid expansion, too. They are in control.”

The Montana Freedom Caucus has called on Governor Greg Gianforte to veto HB 245, the Medicaid expansion bill supported by Democrats and the nine Republican Senators, arguing that it funds abortions and gender transition procedures. The caucus contends that expanding Medicaid in its current form is incompatible with conservative priorities and has urged the Governor not to sign the bill into law.

MTGOP Executive Board member Brad Tschida, who was named as a signatory of the rebuke, also criticized the senators’ actions, arguing that the rebuke did not go far enough. “My motion was for a censure, but it was changed to a strong rebuke, which is like a parent warning their kids for the fourth time without consequences. A rebuke is meaningless—it should have been a censure.”

Tschida further accused the nine senators of ceding power to the Democrats on the very first day of the session. “They voted down the rules, disbanded the ethics committee, and effectively handed control to the Democratic minority. Since then, they have consistently voted against Republican priorities, including measures to rein in judicial overreach.”

He also highlighted growing frustration among conservative voters. “People across Montana—not just in the districts these senators represent—are furious. Their votes have undermined conservative priorities statewide. There’s no mechanism in state law to hold them accountable beyond censure, but we’re looking at other actions we might take,” Tschida said.

Growing Conservative Backlash

The ongoing investigation by the Legislative Auditor into Sen. Jason Ellsworth’s government contract agreements has intensified tensions

within the party. Additionally, Sen. Shelley Vance, one of the nine, introduced an ethics complaint against Sen. Matt Regier—a move some within the party view as political retaliation. These developments have contributed to growing dissatisfaction among Republican voters who feel their electoral mandate is being ignored.

The left-aligned nonprofit Montana Federation of Public Employees, which is closely tied to national teachers’ unions like the NEA and AFT, has been running Facebook ads praising Jason Ellsworth and Sen. Denley Loge (SD45) for their support—raising further concerns among conservatives about their alignment with Democratic priorities.

Constituents Respond: Betrayed by Their Own?

Beyond legislative disputes, the actions of the Out of Line Nine have contributed to growing fractures within the party. Bart Crabtree, founding director of the Montana State Council on Judicial Accountability, stated, “Our work in addressing the utter abuse and neglect of our judiciary has been greatly hampered because of these people.” He further argued that Republicans who consistently vote with Democrats are deceiving voters, saying, “Collective heads must come up with a solution to stop Democrats from running for office on the Republican brand to get elected. It’s deceitful and undermines the process.”

Ruthe McHugh Rater, a Helena Republican voter, argued that the issue extends beyond these nine, pointing out that Sen. Mike Cuffe has also voted with Democrats a significant percentage of the time.

Frustration among conservative voters is mounting. Robin Beadle, a voter from the Bitterroot, expressed anger over what she sees as betrayal by the Out of Line Nine, saying, “The Out of Line Nine have subverted most legislation brought by our duly elected Republican officials. All legislation this session has been bogged down, shifted, and voted against the priorities of the Republican platform.” She added that voters will track their records and seek to remove them from office, stating, “We will keep track of your actions against the voter. We will move to remove you from positions that the voter did not elect you to.”

What’s Next for the Montana GOP?

The MTGOP has warned that if these senators persist in this course of action, the party may take further steps to address the situation. The leadership urged all members to uphold the trust of the voters and work together to advance Montana’s future. 📢

Titus 1:16

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.