

Jennifer Fielder's Calculated Power Play

Engineering a Path to the PSC Presidency

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In the shadowy corridors of Montana's Public Service Commission (PSC), Vice President Jennifer Fielder has emerged as a master of intrigue, wielding policy manuals and backroom maneuvers like a modern-day Machiavelli to consolidate power and silence dissent. Elected to regulate utilities and protect ratepayers, Fielder instead appears fixated on personal vendettas, exceeding her authority to orchestrate witch hunts against colleagues while shrouding her actions in self-authored rules. Her latest target? PSC President Brad Molnar, whom she seems hell-bent on removing—perhaps so she can ascend to the presidency herself. Fielder has pursued his ouster with ruthless efficiency while proposing rule changes to lower barriers for future purges. This isn't public service—it's a brazen assault on democratic principles, where elected officials like Fielder trample voter mandates and constitutional due process in pursuit of unchecked control. For Montana's 1.1 million residents, who foot the bill for this dysfunction through higher utility rates and wasted tax dollars, Fielder's schemes represent a betrayal of trust, prioritizing ego over energy affordability.

Fielder, for her part, says she spearheaded the agency's strategic planning initiatives, modernized the agency's software, and overhauled its internal policies and procedures. She writes on her website that these efforts "have created higher standards of service, performance and conduct throughout the agency." The irony is stark. The very policy manual she authored—the PSC's so-called Blue Book—now fuels deeper divisiveness, ballooning legal fees, and a cascade of outside interventions that could have been avoided if internal channels had been followed. The irony is deeper still: she created the policy manual, knows the rules better than anyone, and repeatedly breaks them. Her "Blue Book" policy manual is a self-styled playbook that privileged unilateral escalation over ordinary internal dispute resolution, drew the governor and the courts into matters that should have been handled inside the agency, and multiplied costs and public harm. The pattern raises the plausible inference that the Blue Book was written to provide its author a mechanism to seize the presidency regardless of whether she ultimately secured that office through the commission's internal vote among commissioners.

The Texting Scandal: Illegal Lobbying and Hiding Behind Lawyers

Fielder's pattern of overreach dates back to at least 2023, when she and fellow Commissioner Annie Bukacek were caught texting then-House Speaker Matt Regier (now Senate President) to lobby for Senate Bill 459, a controversial measure defining sex as binary male or female. In leaked messages, Fielder urged Regier to "Please pass SB 459," while Bukacek chimed in with similar pleas, pressuring him to advance the bill amid legislative gridlock. This wasn't casual chit-chat—it was blatant lobbying by sitting PSC commissioners, who are prohibited under Montana law (MCA 2-2-105) from influencing legislation outside their regulatory scope without registering as lobbyists.

Montana Democrats swiftly filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Political Practices (COPP), accusing Fielder and Bukacek of ethical violations and illegal advocacy. The PSC, under Fielder's influence, responded by hiring outside lawyers at taxpayer expense—racking up undisclosed costs for legal defense—to shield the duo from scrutiny. While the COPP investigation dragged on without a public smackdown (likely due to the all-Republican commission's protective bubble), the incident exposed Fielder and Bukacek's willingness to bend rules for ideological gains. Critics decried it as an abuse of office, with one commentator labeling it "Machiavellian meddling" that diverts PSC focus from utility oversight to partisan politicking. Stonewalling and deflection, claiming the texts were "private conversations," is a flimsy excuse that ignores her public role and the public's right to transparency.

The Molnar Targeting: A Drive to Seize the Presidency

Fast-forward to 2025, and Fielder's tactics have

	Fielder's Overreach	Impact on Due Process/Voters
Texting Scandal (2023)	Texted Speaker Regier to lobby for SB 459 with Commissioner Bukacek; did not register as lobbyists.	Violated lobbying norms; sparked ethics complaint; turned a contained dispute into a public, costly legal fight.
Molnar Targeting (2025)	Unilateral letter to Gov. Gianforte requesting suspension without commission vote; refused to handle issue internally first.	Brought governor and courts into a matter that should have been resolved inside the PSC; risked disenfranchising voters and caused likely litigation.
Blue Book Revisions (2021–2024)	Authored policies allowing vice president to convene response teams and act without full commission votes.	Enabled secretive procedures and unilateral escalations that erode due process and invite lawsuits.
Costly Software Decision (2022–2024)	Pushed for a custom PSC software interface rather than adopting an off-the-shelf or widely used state solution.	Cost roughly \$1 million; no other agency adopted the software; failed to prevent agency turmoil.
Proposed Rule Change (2025)	Lower threshold from 4 to 3 votes for removals/censures.	Makes minority purges easier, deepening instability and undermining accountability.

Sources: Montana Free Press, Daily Montanan, MSU Exponent, WV News reports on PSC disputes and policy changes.

escalated into a concerted campaign to remove PSC President Brad Molnar. In August she unilaterally sent a letter to Gov. Greg Gianforte requesting Molnar's immediate suspension amid an opaque HR investigation into vague "workplace misconduct" allegations—claims Molnar dismisses as a "joke somebody didn't like." Without consulting the full five-member commission or holding a vote, Fielder acted as if she alone wielded the gavel, citing interference and retaliation while providing zero evidence. This power play came suspiciously timed, just 24 hours after NorthWestern Energy's \$3.6 billion merger announcement with Black Hills Corp.—a deal Molnar, with his history of scrutinizing utilities, vowed to rigorously review, and which Governor Gianforte supports.

Molnar fought back in court, securing a temporary restraining order from Judge Mike Menahan, who blasted Fielder's move as "procedurally defective" and a potential "nullification of election results." The judge highlighted how Fielder bypassed the PSC's own rules requiring a public meeting and four-commissioner endorsement for such actions. Yet Fielder persists, framing her escalation as "protecting employees" while creating divisiveness that has paralyzed the agency. By initiating the complaint to the governor rather than exhausting internal remedies first, she drew the governor and the courts into a matter that should have been handled inside the PSC—magnifying costs, delay, and political exposure. Her actions read like a calculated campaign to eliminate an obstacle to her own rise.

The Unconstitutional Blue Book: Fielder's Self-Serving Playbook

At the heart of Fielder's schemes lies the PSC's "Blue Book"—the internal policy manual she spearheaded revisions to after her 2020 election. As vice president, Fielder oversaw updates to this opaque document, embedding procedures that critics call unconstitutional and tailor-made for authoritarian maneuvers. The Blue Book allows the vice president (conveniently, Fielder) to convene a "response team" and unilaterally recommend suspensions without a full commission vote or public hearing—flouting due process rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's Sixth Amendment, which guarantees the accused the right to know charges, confront witnesses, and a speedy trial.

While the Sixth Amendment directly applies to federal criminal cases, Montana's state agencies must adhere to foundational principles of fairness, as echoed in the Montana Constitution's Article II, Section 24 (right to know accusations and confront accusers). Fielder's Blue Book subverts these norms, enabling secret probes and solo power grabs that Molnar's lawsuit deems "gross violations of due process." She crafted rules that let her shroud divisiveness in bureaucracy, turning the PSC into her personal fiefdom. Elected officials like Fielder are accountable to voters, not self-authored edicts—yet her manual prioritizes internal vendettas over public service, wasting resources on infighting while utility rates and oversight deficits grow.

Fielder's Desperate Rule Change: Lowering the Bar for Purges

Not content with the turmoil she's helped create, Fielder is now pushing to rewrite the rules again—this time proposing to lower

the vote threshold for censuring, removing, or filing complaints against a commissioner from four votes to three. That change would let a three-member bloc carry out removals or censures, empowering minority coalitions to oust elected colleagues and further weaponize internal rules. The timing—after unilateral escalations and amid litigation—suggests an attempt to retroactively legitimize maneuvers that already provoked outside intervention and court scrutiny.

Lowering the threshold would deepen the very instability Fielder's website claims to have fixed, making it easier to trigger public crises that cost ratepayers and taxpayers alike.

Costly Software Choice: One-Million-Dollar Expense

Compounding the irony, Fielder championed a custom-built software interface for the PSC. The custom system cost approximately one million dollars. No other government agency has adopted the PSC's software, and the bespoke platform did not eliminate internal conflict or prevent the escalation of disputes into costly legal battles. That procurement stands as a significant expenditure while the commission simultaneously incurs mounting legal fees and political fallout.

End the Witch Hunt: Prioritize People Over Power Plays

The irony is unavoidable: Jennifer Fielder trumpets modernization and higher standards on her website while the PSC—after her Blue Book revisions, unilateral escalations, and expensive custom software choices—lies more divided, more legally entangled, and more costly to taxpayers than before. By initiating a complaint to the governor instead of exhausting internal remedies, pushing budget-bloating technology, and seeking rule changes that lower the safeguards for commissioners, Fielder has converted internal conflict into public spectacle at the state's expense.

Montanans elected commissioners to protect ratepayers and ensure accountable utility oversight, not to stage power plays that force the governor and the courts into an agency dispute. Fielder should stop manufacturing crises, reverse course on wasteful spending, restore internal processes that respect due process, and let the PSC get back to serving the public rather than servile factions. Until then, ratepayers will keep paying—for higher legal bills, political theater, and policies that say one thing and deliver the opposite.

And as for Jennifer Fielder? She's not fielding complaints—she's manufacturing them, proving that in the PSC's power game, Fielder's the one playing dirty to seize the presidency. ☀