Energy Edition

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The Liberty Bell

★ ★ ★ ★ We Are the Grassroots Covering Montana and Surrounding Areas ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Watt's Up?

New Reliable Power Bill Plans to Make Montana Electricity Safer and More Efficient

Improving the Ability of Utilities to Prepare for and Respond to Increased Energy Demands and the Impacts of Drought, Ice and Snow while reducing the Occurrences of Wildfires

Transmission lines can fail due to a variety of reasons, most commonly caused by: weather events like extreme wind; ice accumulation, heavy snow, which can damage the lines or towers; other factors include tree limbs that contact a line and cause an arc which can in turn lead to wildfires; animal interference-mostly bird nests; equipment failure; corrosion; and human error; all leading to potential power outages or disruptions in electricity transmission.

A "transmission line failure" refers to a disruption in the high-voltage power lines that carry electricity over long distances from power plants to distribution points, while a "distribution line failure" occurs on the lower voltage lines that deliver electricity directly to homes and businesses from the substation. Although transmission failures are much rarer than distribution failures, when they happen, they can have huge consequences, such as the 2018 Camp Fire that destroyed 18,000 structures, killed 85 people and destroyed Paradise, CA.

Loss of life and property are not the only casualties of fires. The longer-term consequences affect the future of homeownership as insurance carriers raise rates everywhere to cover the costs of catastrophic losses due to wildfires, hurricane and other natural disaster claims. Carriers also are known to cancel coverage or pull out of insuring certain markets.

Senator Daniel Zolnikov of Billings, MT understands these issues and through his bill (currently LC 0322) is proactively trying to get the Montana Legislature to look at legislating the use of improved transmission products to reduce the chance of wildfires in Montana. Zolnikov understands the need to reduce the chance of wildfires to keep insurance costs as reasonable as possible so as not to exacerbate the difficulties Montanans face in achieving homeownership.

"It's about being prudent and proactive to reduce the exposure Montanans have to wildfires. Although we have luckily avoided the intense fires of California, Montana still has hundreds of wildfires every year, which in turn make insurance costs ridiculously expensive and impractical."

Among the provisions in Zolnikov's bill, would be to require utility companies, when replacing transmission lines, to use newer technology transmission lines made from carbon fiber technology v the 100-year-old aluminum clad steel core lines that are still being used to this day. These new lines

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Watt's Next! Pinocci's Game Changer Transmission Line Transformation

Nationally, within the energy industry, Montana's Public Service Commission Commissioner, Randy Pinocci, is recognized for his impact, and leadership in identifying trends and being an early adopter of emerging technology. His dedication to driving meaningful progress is exactly what the energy sector needs.

"Look, the No. 1 thing you have to take care of are your people, and that's where my priorities are and where the Montana Public Service Commission's need to be," emphasized Pinocci

He was the keynote speaker at the Transmission Infrastructure West conference in San Francisco in December of 2024 where he addressed the benefits of composite core technology over traditional steel core transmission lines. He

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Los Angeles Fires

Arson? Transmission Lines? Fireworks? Cause of the LA Fires Yet Undetermined

Investigators are still working to determine the cause of the catastrophic blazes that have decimated the Los Angeles area, but a jump in power grid faults may serve as a vital clue. As reported by Fox News on January 11, 2025.

Here's what we know:

How did the fires start?

The Palisades Fire - which has destroyed over 21,000 acres - started Tuesday morning, January 7, 2025, in the wealthy Pacific Palisades enclave just east of Malibu.

There are many different theories about what fueled the blaze.

Palisades residents exclusively told DailyMail.com two men were caught on camera dumping gasoline and

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The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. —*Luke:12-2*

(Palisades Fire from page 1A)
setting it on fire just before the deadly Palisades fire broke out.

Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley , who is facing calls to resign, said she believes the fire was started accidentally in a back garden but quickly 'spread at a speed beyond anything we've seen.'

The fire's ferocity may have also been fueled by multiple faults along the Los Angeles power grid where power was not immediately shut off as faults soared in areas worst hit by the fires.

Residents who live at North Piedra Morada Drive quickly made the call around 10 am as the hillside fire progresses closer to the multi-million-dollar homes that dot the Pacific Palisades hillsides, according to the LA Times.

Bob Marshall, the Chief Executive of Whisker Labs, a company that monitors electrical activity along the Los Angeles power grid, says, just hours prior to the Palisades, Eaton and Hurst fires, the company recorded sharp increases in faults on the power grid.

According to the Fox News report, Marshall said his company has a network of approximately 14,000 sensors known as 'ting' sensors, that can pinpoint and identify faults generated by electrical arcs. Whisker Labs is able to monitor the grid with "extraordinary precision," through this network of sensors in homes. Whisker Labs Ting sensors notify homeowners of a surge in power so they can take preventative measures to prevent a house fire. "Through artificial intelligence (AI) we take 30 million electrical measurements every second," says Marchall. He adds that on a typical day faults are a rare occurrence.

Marshall told Fox News, when strong winds cause transmission lines to touch each other or vegetation like tree limbs, it creates a spark in a fault and Whisker Labs can detect it. Sparks from faults can land on the ground igniting dry vegetation like setting a match. High winds then carry the flames at rapid speeds.

In the Palisades areas, where the largest fire is raging, Whisker Labs reported there were 63 faults within two to three hours prior to the start of the fires. In the Altadena area, Whisker Labs reports there were 317 faults prior to the ignition of that fire, and in the Hurst Fire, 230 faults were recorded by the network prior to the start of that fire.

Although we cannot conclude that the fires started from transmission lines, The Wall Street Journal reported when the faults started to sharply rise, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power didn't proactively turn off power to mitigate the risk of a wildfire starting.

Newsom has come under fire for slashing California's funding for wildfire and forest resilience by $101 million less than a year before devastating fires tore through Los Angeles.

Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA) blasted Mayor Bass, "Just seeing these scenes of absolute total destruction, these apocalyptic scenes. I mean, it is shocking. It is surreal," the congressman stated in a Newsmax interview.

Rep. Kiley (R-CA) said California needs to get back to basics: "Manage our forests. Store our water. Maintain our grid. Build our roads. Fund our police and fire. Do the things government is supposed to do, do them well, and do nothing else."

"It is the culmination of years and years of policy failure in California, where we've had absolutely insane forest management policies, insane water policies. We haven't adequately prioritized support for firefighting. We've had an insurance crisis that's been spiraling out of control," he said. "We have by far the worst homelessness situation in the entire country. And homelessness leads to a lot of fires as well. And all of this has gotten much, much worse during the Newsom administration."

Actor Mel Gibson, who lost his home in the fire, was on Fox New's Laura Ingraham Show

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and questioned if the fires were similarly 'commissioned' to Lahaina, Hawaii's fires, in order to remove people from valuable real estate that is planned to become a 'Smart City.'

"I can make all kinds of horrible theories up in my head, conspiracy theories and everything else, but it just seemed a little convenient that there was no water," Gibson said. "And that the wind conditions were right and that there are people ready and willing and able to start fires," he conjectured. The actor then referenced how police in the area caught strangers, perhaps illegals and homeless, that were equipped with jars of gasoline and other ignition material.

"As officials try to determine the cause of a wildfire that has burned an estimated 7,000 structures in and around Altadena, investigators keep returning to an electrical transmission tower in Eaton Canyon."

"I know they were messing with the water, letting reserves go for one reason or another. They've been doing that for awhile. California has a lot of problems that sort of baffle the mind as far as why they do things," he noted.

"And then in events like this, you sort of look, well, is it on purpose? Which, it's an insane thing to think. But one begins to ponder whether or not there is a purpose in mind. What could it be? You know, what do they want? The state empty? I don't know," he opined.

Ingraham commented, "And obviously there's a great need for high density housing in California and across the country. That's a big push by the climate folks. And you're already hearing rumblings of that. In this case, like goodbye single-family homes. Hello high density housing!"

The actor remarked at the 'pretty scary' idea and added that it reminded him of 'old cattle barons clearing people off the land.'

Gibson is not alone in his theories, and many heated disagreements over the handling of the wildfires have cropped up. More than 180,000

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people have been displaced from their homes since the fire started in Pacific Palisades on January 7th, according to NBC Los Angeles. It has scorched more than 40,000 acres in less than a week and displacing almost 400,000 people according to Cal Fire data.

At least 27 people have been killed and more than 12,300 structures destroyed, including many celebrity mansions, in some of the worst fires in memory to engulf America's second biggest city. As of print time, the Palisades Fire is 56% contained, and the Eaton Fire is 73% contained.

The fire is on track to rank among the most expensive natural disasters in American history. Morningstar DBRS estimates insured losses from the infernos to surpass $8 billion, a figure that could change depending on the final count of damaged properties. JP Morgan's analysts predict that overall insured losses could be higher than $20 billion, a Financial Times report on January 10th suggested.

The LA fires will take a heavy toll on property insurers with exposure in areas affected by the blazes and in other states as well. Even before these catastrophic fires, the property insurance market in California—home to about 40 million people—had struggled due to the mounting risk of wildfires, surging construction costs and regulations limiting insurers' ability to hike rates. Some of the largest insurers, including State Farm and Allstate, have been quietly pulling out of the Golden State, refusing to either insure new customers or renew existing policies. The latest event may accelerate this insurer exodus, lead to increased premiums and make it even more difficult for homeowners to find affordable insurance in the state.

LA's $750k-A-Year Water Chief Janisse Quiñones 'Knew About Empty Reservoir and Broken Hydrants' Months Before Fires

The $750,000-a-year LA water czar came from PG&E (remember PG&E from Erin Brockovich fame where PG&E poisoned the water in Hinkley, CA and the Dixie and Camp fires?). Those fires cost PG&E a $13.5 billion legal settlement. The DailyMail.com writes, "She served as Senior Vice President at Pacific Gas & Electric from 2021 to 2023. PG&G's power lines sparked the second-largest wildfire in California history, Dixie, in 2021. Quiñones is also responsible for a raft of failures that contributes to the devasting Palisades Fire, fire department insiders confided to the DailyMail.com.

"On Mayor Karen Bass's orders, the city maxed out its budget to 'attract private-sector talent', hiring Department of Water and Power (LADWP) CEO Janisse Quiñones on a $750,000 salary in May – almost double that of her predecessor," as reported by the DailyMail.com.

Once again, per the DailyMail.com, "Quiñones is being blamed by LA Fire Department (LAFD) insiders for leaving a nearby reservoir disconnected and fire hydrants broken for months, leading to firefighters running out of water as they battled the devastating Palisades Fire."

The DailyMail.com's take**:**

"It can simultaneously be true that stuff is on fire in LA, AND that the story of stuff being on fire is being weaponized by patriots in order to shed light on systemic corruption and long-buried truths."

Quiñones joined PG&E in April 2021 as Senior

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The Coal Ash Saga: Ugly Truths & Hidden Benefits

WRITTEN BY
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Montana's greatest need to keep everything in the state running (and keeping people warm and alive) in periods of our famous minus 45 degree cold spells is reliable availability of electricity. That standard is called Resource Adequacy and is most reliably provided by 'baseload power", in large part in Montana, the coal fired steam generating plants in Colstrip.

But while the energy which this coal generates is put to use efficiently in Montana, its coal ash residue is not…but could be.

This coal ash, known as Coal Combustion Residuals (CCR), has the potential to serve as an income boon to state tax revenues and provide vital national security benefits to America according to many sources, including the EPA and the Department of Defense.

For many years public and private entities have been conducting amazing research into what is referred to as Beneficial Use of CCRs. We refer to this simply as recycling: turning something that has been used for one purpose into another useful product instead of discarding it as trash.

Coal ash ponds have been leaching unhealthy metals into the ground affecting groundwater for decades. The simplest way to deal with this problem is to move it to another pond which purports to have an "impermeable" liner, "guaranteed to never leak". Like most really simple solutions, this is also the most expensive in multiple ways.

When coal is incinerated at fabulous temperatures, that which is left over as a byproduct is ash. But what remains is that which is NOT burned up and holds the key to the solution to many needs. Part of this ash, known as 'fly ash' has been used for decades as a beneficial ingredient in cement and concrete…it was a crucial element to provide the strength to hold back enormous amounts of water in the Hoover Dam. Millions of tons of coal ash is used every year in concrete for roads, bridges, and other concrete construction.

Overwhelming research over the world has demonstrated practical uses of this ash as a ***resource*** not as **refuse**. Innovation will solve the needs of society. Commercial uses for coal ash range from construction materials to elements vital to modern life and national defense known as Rare Earth minerals or Rare Earth Elements (REEs). These 17 REEs include boron, cobalt, lithium, molybdenum, radium, thallium and uranium.

At a January speech at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, Adam Burstein, technical director for strategic and critical minerals in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for industrial base policy stated that 'secure sourcing of rare earth material is critical to the defense industrial base which uses them to produce virtually every Defense Department system, from unmanned aerial systems and fighter jets and submarines'.

Enormous Cache of Rare Earth Elements are Hidden Inside Coal Ash Waste

These REEs occur in varying concentrations naturally in soil and coal. Research has found that these REEs are relatively unaffected by the coal incineration process and indeed are rendered much more readily recoverable through various filtration or chemical treatments.

Davin Bagdonas, a research scientist at the University of Wyoming states, "There's huge volumes of this stuff all over the country," Bagdonas said. "And the upfront process of extracting the (mineral host) is already taken care of for us."

In simpler terms, as most of the bulk of the coal is burned away, the REEs left behind are more easily isolated and extracted. Utilizing coal ash deposits for REE mining has many benefits over creating a new mine. The multiple government land use permits (esp. water) usually take several years to be issued (if at all) and take up large areas of land whereas coal ash ponds require neither and are immediately available, thus, avoiding years of red-tape congestion for which government bureaucracy is so famous.

Purdue University adds that "these elements have important applications in high-tech electronics such as batteries, TV screens and cellphones". The EPA says that "Coal ash can be beneficially used to replace virgin materials from the earth, conserving natural resources. The EPA encourages the beneficial use of coal ash in an appropriate and protective manner because this practice can produce environmental, economic and product benefits".

The American Coal Ash Association and the University of Kentucky Center for Applied Energy Research have hosted a major conference, World of Coal Ash, every 2 years since 2005 with many research presentations and hundreds of participants. The Department of Energy and the EPA host equally important technical conferences as well, which deal with beneficial "re-use' of otherwise pollutants including CCRs and co2. Interesting 're-uses' of co2 range from perfume to vodka and jet fuel; so much for being useless!

In Montana, we should be using Colstrip's coal ash to produce concrete for the construction industry. However, as I understand it, Talen Energy, the unregulated operator of the Colstrip plants, has proceeded with a process of dewatering and compressing the coal ash and storing it in a building. This is not a beneficial use as defined by the industry, but it seems better than spending the estimated amounts of $163-285 million dollars to move it to a lined pond, (from one hole in the ground to another) which may just be another "kicking the can down the road" to confront future leaders with more groundwater contamination.

A bill was introduced in the last session of the Montana Legislature, HB 753, entitled An Act Prioritizing the Beneficial Use and Repurposing of Coal Ash. Despite having 32 co-sponsors, the bill died in committee. Its sole purpose was to require prioritizing reuse (recycling) of these CCRs where reasonable.

To my knowledge, one Beneficial Use Determination (BUD) for Colstrip CCRs was issued by the Montana DEQ which seemed to say that the chemical remediation process it reviewed would indeed work as proposed, that is, providing a total transformation of the ash into a "Made in Montana" marketable product leaving no waste materials at all. That proposal was ignored by our state administration despite its potential to significantly contribute to state and local tax revenues and solve an acute environmental problem.

It is quite clear to me that Innovation by the profit making free market is the best means to solve these pressing problems. Embracing the Waste to Wealth and Ashes to Assets mentality is making real progress in the rest of the country, but not in Montana.

If you have a suggestion for how to cut government waste, either at the school board, city, county, state or federal level, please submit your suggestions here:

DOGE *Inbox*

Send your email to:
ideas@dogeinbox.com
or go to **dogemt.com**
and submit your suggestions online

Coal Ash: "Why would we be importing it?"

AP Richmond reporter Sarah Rankin learned from a state lawmaker that despite the U.S. generating hundreds of millions of tons of coal ash each year and despite millions of tons of ash already stored near power plants, Chinese coal ash was being imported into Virginia. When coal ash is stored in ponds or in landfills, it threatens surface and ground water with contamination by heavy metals. Rankin's story pinpointed where the overseas ash was coming from: China, India and Poland over the past two years. No one tracks how much ash arrives at ports nationwide, though the American Coal Ash Association (ACAA) is starting to try.

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highlighted the potential insurance implications, and the broader vision of how to meet the energy demands of other emerging technology such as AI and crypto-currencies, and their ravenous energy consumption needs.

At the heart of Pinocci's message was the need to challenge the assumption that our electric grid needs completely replaced in order to handle the higher energy demands from data centers, electric vehicles and a growing population. He strongly believes we should prioritize a safe, reliable, and affordable grid.

"Discussions are still occurring over which carbon core transmission lines should be used in the change-over and what level of voltage those lines should carry, but there should be no doubt addressing higher energy needs and safety concerns about going to higher voltage will require we move away from the less efficient and more dangerous steel lines that we have been using for the last 100 years, says Pinocci. This is reflected in Pinocci's knowledge of the industry, "Steel-core systems might have been revolutionary over 100 years ago, but continuing to rely on them like we do today locks the grid into inefficiency, increased risk, and higher operational costs for decades to come."

Montana can start by replacing outdated legacy steel-core transmission lines, a technology that has served its purpose for over a century but now represents a major vulnerability, especially when compared to composite core technology, which Pinocci believes is superior in every critical metric.

"We start by raising the standards and requiring this new technology on any new lines being installed and when replacing older lines," says Pinocci. It will take years before all existing steel core lines are replaced, but Pinocci advises this process start immediately so cost savings and wildfire mitigation can start.

The number one reason utilities are reluctant to implement the new technology has to do with the cost of the technology, but Pinocci understands, "We lose money every day we continue to install outdated steel core technology. We don't build an airplane out of steel any longer, and we shouldn't be building our transmission lines out of it any longer either. Today Boeing is using more and more carbon fiber. Boeing led the way that strength can be light and this technology gives us more efficiency cutting our carbon footprint."

Data suggests the United States can save billions and Pinocci follows the data. "If you believe in climate change, you should be clamoring for this technology. This technology cuts energy loss by 20-40% and reduce fires by half, and we will save lives," adds Pinocci.

"Every day we go without mandating this new technology we are leaving an extraordinary amount of money on the table through lost energy, not to mention we are gambling with the property and lives of our constituents. My focus is on safety, reliability and affordability. Every PSC Commissioner should have those goals in mind. The more expensive line is the old technology even though the new technology cost more," emphasized Pinocci.

He also emphasized the need for insurance incentives to drive proactive upgrades on a larger scale. In his keynote he focused on, "It's not just about the grid's safety and efficiency; it's about practical risk mitigation. The costs associated with replacing steel-core transmission lines after catastrophic failures, whether due to wildfires, storms, or sag-related incidents, are far greater than the costs of upgrading to composite core transmission lines today." Although this advanced transmission line technology is roughly twice as expensive, utilities and insurers alike need to see these upgrades not as expenses but as investments in the long-term reliability and safety of the grid and the communities it supports. Likewise, insurance carriers should work to lower the cost of insuring the lines based on their superior reliability and durability in various weather conditions compared to traditional steel core lines.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) rates our existing infrastructure at a concerning grade of C-.

Why composite core transmission lines are the superior choice

Pinocci is an ardent supporter of composite core transmission lines which are a focus for the companies CTC Global and Epsilon Composite. From Pinocci's perspective, what makes them such a transformative technology for the grid is their scalable solution.

Here's how Pinocci explained the superiority of the technology during his keynote:

> **SAG:** First, composite cores don't sag as much as traditional steel core transmission lines. Under higher winds (up to 200-300 mph), under extreme heat, temps above 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and under heavier weight from snow and ice, the composite core transmission lines maintained safe clearances. This means the lines avoided contact with tree limbs which is a leading cause of grid associated wildfires. By ensuring conductors stay well above critical clearances and run cooler or more efficiently, utilities can enhance safety and prevent costly fire-related incidents.

Unlike legacy steel-core transmission lines, composite cores are engineered to withstand extreme heat without any plastic deformation or loss in strength. During extreme wildfire events, hurricanes and even EF5 Tornado's, composite core transmission lines survived in place better than any other transmission lines; which minimizes service interruptions and post-event repairs.

Composite core can handle up to twice the current of traditional steel transmission lines which means more power can be carried on the same transmission towers resulting in lower infrastructure cost, and more power delivered to homes and businesses. This increased capacity allows utilities to meet growing energy demands without having to build additional infrastructure, providing a cost-effective way to expand grid capabilities.

Beyond reliability and resilience, composite core transmission lines are helping utilities meet carbon efficiency goals. By delivering up to a 40% reduction in line losses, these advanced materials significantly reduce energy waste and associated carbon emissions. This efficiency not only lowers operational costs for utilities but also enables them to recover their investments often times within a matter of years. The result is a grid that is more sustainable and affordable for consumers.

With such advantages over traditional steel core transmission lines, it begets the question of why they aren't being deployed throughout the country. The reality is that innovation in the utility sector often faces barriers rooted in a general reluctance to adopt new technologies. Many utilities are understandably cautious, prioritizing proven methods and systems over what might feel like uncharted territory.

There's also a lack of incentives in some cases, both from regulatory bodies and within the utilities themselves, to move away from legacy systems like steel-core transmission lines. Add to that a lack of technological awareness, not everyone fully understands the transformative potential of composite core conductors yet.

Another factor unique to the United States is the sheer complexity of undertaking large transmission projects. With thousands of utilities operating across different regulatory jurisdictions, achieving alignment on infrastructure upgrades can be challenging. It's not that the technology isn't ready, it's that the system sometimes slows adoption.

However, over the past 20 years, we have seen more and more advanced transmission lines being installed across the world, from highly developed regions to fast-growing nations like Bangladesh, which alone has installed more advanced transmission lines than all of the United States. These technologies are rapidly becoming the standard for modern grids.

The tide is turning, and the momentum is clear. As awareness grows and utilities see the tangible benefits, we expect composite core transmission lines to become a mainstay of grid modernization efforts globally and especially within the United States.

Wildfire risks and proven solutions

Wildfires are one of the most pressing threats to grid reliability, especially in fire-prone regions. It deeply impacts both utilities and the communities they serve. The integration

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of composite core is a proven strategy for reducing wildfire risks, and Pinocci believes this technology could cut wildfire incidents substantially when deployed at scale; especially in states like Montana.

Composite cores combine lightweight design, superior strength, and thermal stability, making them ideal for grid associated fire mitigation. They are typically twice as strong and ~70% lighter than steel-core, reducing stress on structures and maintaining critical clearances as mentioned. Their ability to remain stable under extreme heat minimizes ignition risks during high demand and fire conditions.

Key benefits of composite core conductors in wildfire mitigation

Composite cores are engineered to maintain superior ground clearance and resist sag under high loads and temperatures. This significantly lowers the risk of vegetation contact, a leading cause of wildfire ignition near electrical networks. By ensuring that transmission lines remain cooler and well above flammable materials, composite cores directly address one of the most preventable wildfire risks we know of.

Unlike traditional steel-core, composite cores are specifically designed to withstand extreme heat without deforming or losing structural integrity. Steel-core systems often fail under such conditions, or sag beyond allowed clearances, whereas composite cores have proven survivability during the most challenging wildfire events.

Composite core remains operational after exposure to wildfire conditions, eliminating the need for immediate replacements. This resilience reduces reliance on emergency repair crews and the challenges of sourcing hard-to-find installation equipment during crisis situations. Utilities can restore service faster while keeping costs in check.

Tower Raising: A Key Solution for Grid Resilience and Modernization

Another key technological advance is tower raising, particularly Ampjack's system which offers a smart and highly effective solution to one of the grid's most critical challenges: achieving adequate clearance and simplifying permitting processes. These systems allow utilities to raise existing towers instead of constructing new ones, addressing key safety and wildfire mitigation concerns while minimizing the complexity and cost of grid upgrades.

By adopting efficient permitting practices and leveraging proven technologies like Ampjack's tower-raising system, utilities can save time, millions of dollars, and resources across all project aspects. Less costly permitting combined with real technological advancements should be the only way forward.

Raising transmission towers significantly reduces vegetation contact, directly mitigating wildfire risks. This increased clearance ensures safer operations, particularly in fire-prone areas with dense vegetation and challenging terrain.

Advanced systems like Ampjack allow towers to be elevated while lines remain energized. This eliminates the need for service interruptions during upgrades, ensuring uninterrupted grid reliability and reducing operational disruptions.

By utilizing existing infrastructure, tower raising avoids the lengthy delays and environmental impacts associated with new tower construction. This accelerates project timelines, reduces costs, and helps utilities comply with regulatory requirements more efficiently.

Tower raising is an indispensable tool in the grid modernization process and when paired with composite core transmission lines, the benefits of tower raising are amplified. This approach represents a forward-thinking strategy to tackle today's challenges and prepare for the demands of the future.

Montana's leadership: Senate Bill LC0322 and the path forward

Senate Bill LC0322 represents a significant step forward in ensuring that advanced transmission line technology is both incentivized and integrated into the modern grid. The bill allows advanced transmission lines to be rate-based if they meet specific cost-effectiveness criteria, including reduced line losses, enhanced reliability, and another consumer and environmental benefits.

This legislation is transformative because it ties investment in grid infrastructure to measurable efficiency gains. By requiring at least, a 10% reduction in direct current electrical resistance compared to existing transmission lines, Senate Bill LC0322 prioritizes the adoption of cutting-edge solutions like composite core technology. We are now pushing for a 20% reduction in direct current electrical resistance and recognize that we need to set the bar even higher. This is critical for ensuring safe, reliable, and affordable energy for Montanans.

The North Plains Connector is another vital piece of the puzzle. This $700 million interregional project will connect the eastern and western U.S. grids, positioning Montana as a key player in addressing national energy challenges. It's not just about linking grids; it's about fortifying our energy infrastructure to handle modern demands while minimizing vulnerabilities. The integration of composite core into these projects will play a pivotal role in achieving these goals by enhancing efficiency and resilience.

In 2025, Pinocci's agenda focuses on scaling the adoption of composite core and tower raising solutions both within Montana and beyond. It's about taking proactive steps to modernize Montana's grid while addressing climate-driven challenges like wildfires.

"I cannot speak about which elected officials in California did what and who ultimately deserves the blame for the epic mismanagement there, but it clearly is the result of a failure to prepare on the part of California's elected officials. Their wildfire has reduced much of the Los Angeles area to rubble and ash making it look like parts of Ukraine," added Pinocci.

Moreover, Pinocci's exploring ways to incentivize utilities, such as offering insurance breaks for adopting advanced technologies. This aligns with the Montana Public Service Commission's vision to make grid improvements not just necessary but economically advantageous for all stakeholders. The legislative session in January will be a critical platform for discussing these priorities with utility leaders, policymakers, and technology providers like Ampjack and CTC Global and Epsilon Composite.

Senate Bill LC0322 is just the beginning. The success of these initiatives in Montana serves as a blueprint for other states. By identifying high-risk transmission corridors—our so-called "red lines"—and targeting them for modernization with advanced transmission lines, we can create a safer, more efficient, and sustainable grid across the nation.

"This is a historic opportunity to lead the country in adopting better technology and improving energy efficiency. By supporting these efforts, we can drive a transformative shift that reduces carbon emissions, enhances reliability, and ensures a stronger, more sustainable grid for generations to come," adds Pinocci. He advocates for the public to contact a Montana legislator to show their support and help make this vision a reality.

The January session will be a cornerstone for advancing wildfire mitigation and grid modernization. It's a unique opportunity to bring together policymakers, utilities, and industry innovators to address the grid's most pressing challenges while showcasing proven technologies that can deliver real solutions.

Here's what we'll focus on:

We'll highlight how composite core transmission lines, like those from CTC Global or Epsilon, reduce wildfire risks, improve efficiency, and deliver long-term cost savings. It represents the future of grid reliability, offering unparalleled resilience and operational benefits.

Demonstrations will showcase how tower-raising systems, like those offered by Ampjack, complement composite cores by addressing critical clearance issues and simplifying permitting challenges. This pairing of technologies provides a comprehensive approach to grid modernization.

Establishing clear and measurable efficiency standards will be a key topic. These benchmarks are critical for phasing out outdated steel-core systems and accelerating the adoption of advanced technologies like composite cores. By setting robust standards, we ensure that utilities are investing in solutions that meet the grid's evolving needs.

This isn't just a legislative session—it's a call to action. The energy sector is at a turning point, and sessions like this provide the platform to align on strategies that work for the current energy needs of Montana and the growth expected in the future. Pinocci is incredibly excited because this is how the needle moves forward with proven advancements in a space that desperately needs innovation.

Through his research and dedication to studying the technology of the energy industry, Pinocci believes companies like CTC Global and Epsilon composite are setting the gold standard for grid modernization. Their composite core transmission lines are proven, scalable, and essential for creating a grid that is both resilient and efficient. They address critical challenges like wildfire mitigation, line efficiency, and operational reliability, making them indispensable for the grid of tomorrow.

Ampjack's tower-raising technology is another proven solution that tackles clearance issues, streamline permitting, and enhance grid safety. Together, these innovations provide a comprehensive approach to the challenges Montana utilities face today.

The tools are here, the solutions are proven, and Pinocci believes the time to act is now. "Together, we need to build a Reliable, Safe, and Affordable grid that meets the demands of the future while protecting our communities, natural resources, and critical infrastructure," Pinocci emphasized.

Pinocci is passionate about doing what is right and in the best interests of Montanans. He states, "Whatever the cause, climate changes are causing drought conditions which lead to heighten conditions for wildfires and the safety of Montanans is paramount. We need to raise the standards of what a conductor or power lines should meet. I see no future for steel core conductors. We must require the far superior carbon fiber, core conductors, especially in areas of high fire risk throughout Montana and our national parks. Not only do we protect our state from forest fires, but it's essential for the safety of Montana's citizens. Raising conductor and powerline standards will save lives and be the better investment overall for Montana."

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. —*I Peter 4:10*

National Security

Cost-effective Solutions for Tackling Wildfires and EMP Attacks on Our Grid

The United States' current power grid infrastructure is grappling with the challenges of transitioning to renewable energy sources and the planet is overdue for a Carrington event (solar Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) event, let alone an EMP event produced by nefarious international or domestic enemies.

As a result, the U.S. needs to consider the national security implications of having our military equipment and grid system above ground; especially, with the West stricken by rising temperatures, deepening drought and blasting winds, often all that's needed to ignite a fire is a spark. Increasingly, power lines strung through expansive wildlands to sprawling Western communities provide the flashes that grow into megafires.

Power lines shouldn't be sparking wildfires anymore, said Paul Chinowsky of Resilient Analytics, an engineering consulting firm in Boulder, Colorado that focuses on adaptation to climate impacts. "This should be one of the top priorities that's going on in the West," Chinowosky said. "If we want to minimize wildfires, if we want to minimize the risk to our reliability, start undergrounding."

Burying electrical distribution lines prevents nearly all such ignitions, and the related power outages, but prices of up to $4 million or more for each mile of "undergrounding," and difficult logistics have prevented widespread adoption of the practice. Most tunnels dug today are made by massive, mechanical rotary boring machines, which scratch cutting wheels against rock and evacuate the debris behind them, lining the tunnel walls as they go. It's painstakingly slow, hugely expensive, and the cutting heads and drill bits often need changing or maintenance.

An EarthGrid plasma boring torch cutting through limestone. Photo credit: EarthGrid

A lack of robust transmission infrastructure to move large amounts of power around the country underscores the urgent need for innovation and safety. That's where companies with patented plasma-powered technology, like Bay area EarthGrid's, come into play with exponentially faster boring, at a fraction of the cost and with next to no environmental impact. Earthgrid says it's developing a plasma boring robot that can dig underground tunnels 100x faster and up to 98% cheaper than existing tech, and it plans to use it to start re-wiring America's energy, internet and utilities grids.

You can do this without touching the rock walls at all, so the equipment can do entire tunnels without stopping if necessary. It can run entirely on electrical power, opening up the possibility of entirely emissions-free drilling, and both Petra and Earthgrid claim it's much, much faster and cheaper than doing things mechanically – to the point where previously unfeasible projects can become economically viable.

To comprehend the innovation behind EarthGrid's technology, it is essential to delve into the mechanics of tunnel boring. Traditional methods involve the use of mechanical drills, but EarthGrid's approach employs torches powered by plasma created from electricity and airflow. This plasma torch reaches temperatures in the realm of thousands of degrees Celsius, which enables the machines to bore rapidly through various geological formations via vaporization and spallation. The machines' ability to operate at various depths underground is a key advantage, allowing them to navigate beneath the existing maze of underground utilities.

Advantages of Plasma Boring

The speed and cost-effectiveness of EarthGrid's plasma drilling technology stem from its adaptability to diverse geologies without slowing down. Conventional methods can experience delays when confronted with different terrains, and often complete abandonment of projects due to the degree of

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(Watt's Up? from page 1A)

are roughly twice as expensive, but have the ability to carry twice the capacity of electricity, with 40% less line loss-meaning more power is delivered to the recipient of the power instead of lost along the way; and to boot, this new technology reduces the chance of wildfires from transmission lines by 60%. Line loss decreases mean projections for when new power plants need to go online can be pushed further out. This results in significant cost-savings to consumers because the costs of building more capacity is enormous and that cost gets passed to consumers on their electric bills.

"Wall Street is going green whether you like it or not and what the states that surround Montana do in their legislatures affects Montana directly. I'm trying to address the trends with available technology to stay ahead of the curve and not only save Montanans money, but also lives and property," Zolnikov noted.

Energy demand in Montana and around the country is exponentially increasing and the permitting process to build new power plants or install solar or wind turbines can take decades. Zolnikov sees the need to improve efficiency immediately to bridge the gap between where we are now in our energy needs and where we will be within a few short years. "While we are attempting to build out new power facilities, which takes many years to do, this transmission line technology will buy us the time we need to continue providing reliable power until the new power facilities go online. If we don't take these steps now, I don't see how we avoid brown-outs and black-outs like what California is experiencing."

Add to this the legalization of marijuana in Montana and the push for crypto-currency and AI data centers and we are looking at the need to add a tremendous amount of energy production to Montana and the target for that placement is for 'green' energy on agricultural land.

Zolnikov is trying to get ahead of the curve with Bill LC 0322 by making the current transmission of power produced in Montana more efficient. With better planning for our future energy grid, we can hope to not only save Montana agricultural land, but also meet the energy demands in Montana and reduce the risk of transmission line generated wildfires that jeopardize the safety of lives and security of private property.

Zolnikov's bill pulls together several immediate needs in the Montana energy sector-to improve reliability of our grid while also providing for improved efficiency and safety of our energy transmission. LC0322 is not only a common-sense bill, but one that will save lives and property and showcase Montana as a leader in the country utilizing advance technology in transmission lines that will lead the way to a cleaner and more powerful grid for Montana and the states it powers.

The resources, reforms, and improvements contained in this legislation are precisely the types of advancements the state and the country need to advance to meet the needs of making Montana and America great again.

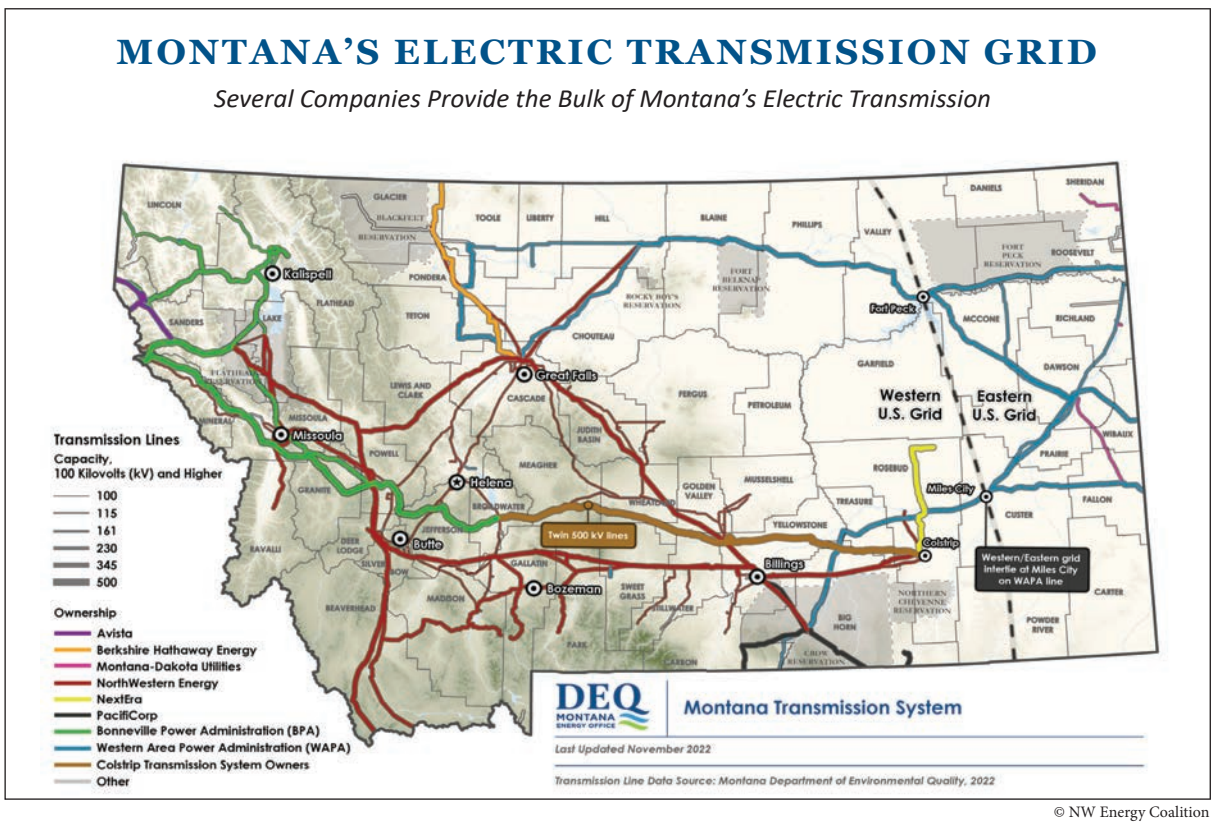
Zolnikov's concerns about the lack of implementation into these technologies is evident, "Some places have lines that were put up in the early 1900. It is like using Model T technology in the era of self-driving cars." Zolnikov exhorts, "Why are we replacing old technology with the same 100 year old technology when the advancements in transmission lines address core issues that have an immediate impact on every Montanan in the state. Legislators need to be concerned about the true costs to consumers of using dramatically less efficient systems, as well as, being concerned about wildfire mitigation, grid reliability, less energy loss and having twice the carrying capacity. This helps our constituents achieve lower overall energy and insurance costs, not to mention improving public safety." He adds, "The cost of these newer transmission lines can be quickly recouped because you normally have to replace the pole which requires a new permit and sometimes even lawsuits. This technology allows new cable to be placed on existing towers as maintenance, reducing the need for re-permitting while giving you twice the carrying capacity."

Utilities do not have financial incentives to save electricity. The incentives come from the valuation of their assets which increase more when they build power plants. As Zolnikov puts it, "Utility companies are not incentivized to find efficiencies, they are incentivized to build more capacity." Line loss decrease means their projections for new power plant building decreases and that doesn't help the utilities bottom line.

"Utilities are already replacing lines all the time, the aim of my bill is to get them to stop using technology that gets them the equivalent of 5 miles per gallon, when there are alternatives that deliver 20 miles per gallon," Zolnikov added. That might cost them more per gallon right now, but the efficiency and other safety and cost savings are worth it."

These carbon fiber core conductors also have fiber optic technology that can sense when portions of the line are overheating, or in contact with vegetation and quickly pinpoint and alert crews to where repairs needs to be made. This results in either no down-time or shorter down-time for lines and quicker mitigation on issues like wildfires. "That's technology that can reduce liability and result in lower insurance costs for the utilities, as well as, the public," Zolnikov emphasized.

Zolnikov likes to think long-term and employ technology in places where its effective use produces multiple benefits. He exhorts these benefits by stating, "This technology allows us to not only address wildfire liability, but be able to make cost effective decisions for the future of our energy grid."



Feeling the Heat?

Homeownership costs increase as insurance rates rapidly heat up due to wildfires

The LA Wildfires are front and center in the news today, but Montana could easily be substituted in the headlines. In the not-too-distant past, we watched in horror as the 2018 Camp Fire burned Paradise, CA to the ground with horrific loss of life and property. The cause of the deadly Camp Fire was determined to be due to strong winds which caused a PG&E powerline to snap and ignite the vegetation below the transmission line. PG&E is no stranger to disasters. In 1993, Erin Brockovich became a whistleblower when she spoke out against PG&E after finding widespread unexplained illness in the town of Hinkley, California. She became instrumental in suing the utility company on behalf of the town. The case (Anderson, et al. v. Pacific Gas & Electric, file BCV 00300) alleged contamination of drinking water in Hinkley with hexavalent chromium (also written as "chromium 6", "chromium VI", "Cr-VI" or "Cr-6").
At the center of the case was the Hinkley compressor station, built in 1952 as a part of a natural-gas pipeline connecting to the San Francisco Bay Area. Between 1952 and 1966, PG&E used hexavalent chromium in a cooling tower system to fight corrosion. The waste-water was discharged to unlined ponds at the site, and some of the waste water percolated into the groundwater. The case was settled in 1996 for $333 million ($666.6 million in 2024), the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit in United States history to that date.

PG&E is the United State's largest utility company, with more than 5.5 million customers across California. It is one of six regulated, investor-owned electric utilities (IOUs) in California. The formal finding of liability in the catastrophic Northern California Camp Wildfire led to losses in federal bankruptcy court and on January 14, 2019, PG&E filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

Like California, Montana experiences similar wind gusts and drought and could easily experience wildfires like those that have recently plagued California. Whether you believe increased logging and forest thinning and clearing activities would diminish the amount or destructiveness of wildfires or not, one thing is clear, better transmission technology would reduce the probability of fire caused by downed utility lines.

This should hit home for residents of Montana as finding homeowner's insurance gets harder and harder. Losing a home and treasured possessions is a heartbreaking scenario for anyone; but when there's no insurance to cover the losses, heartbreak becomes a catastrophe for the homeowner. This is especially relevant for thousands of LA homeowners who are uninsured due to nearly a dozen major insurance providers like State Farm, Nationwide, Farmers Insurance, Allstate, USAA, and The Hartford one by one either no longer issuing new policies in high-risk areas or limiting their coverage to reduce their exposure to claims.

CA homeowners who were dropped by their insurance carriers, are not only uninsured and are eating the cost of the loss of their home, they also will be unable to obtain new loans to rebuild as all traditional mortgages require homeowner insurance as a prerequisite to obtaining the loan.

Although figures aren't currently available, the scale of the uninsured losses are huge. State Farm, the region's biggest insurer with a portfolio of 250,000 homes in LA County, dropped 1,600 policies in the Palisades in July 2024, and more than 2,000 policies in other LA zip codes. The situation with State Farm is echoed by other big insurers in the region.

Before the fires burned more than 10,000 structures in Los Angeles County, insurers chose not to renew thousands of home insurance policies in Pacific Palisades, Altadena and other fire-prone areas. The rising costs and cancellations left many fire victims without adequate means to cover their losses, highlighting a deepening crisis in California' and other western and coastal states property insurance market.

In California, some homeowners have been

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offered insurance, but at astronomical sums that make homeownership unaffordable; especially on a fixed income. The LA Times cites one homeowner, Francis Bischetti, who for his home in Pacific Palisades received a renewal quote in 2024 of $18,000, up from $4,500 the previous year. It was an amount he could not possibly afford.

Neither could he get onto the California FAIR (Fair Access to Insurance Requirements) Plan, which provides fewer benefits, because he said he would have to cut down 10 trees around his roof line to lower the fire risk — something else the 55-year-old personal assistant found too costly to manage.

So, he decided he would do what's called "going bare" — not buying any coverage on his home in the community's El Medio neighborhood. He figured if he watered his property year-round, that might be protection enough given its location south of Sunset Boulevard. Bischetti's home was burned to the ground on Tuesday, January 7, 2025.

According to data from the California Department of Insurance, between 2020 and 2022, insurance companies declined to renew 2.8 million homeowner policies in the state. Over half a million were in Los Angeles County.

"These fast-moving, wind-driven infernos have created one of the costliest wildfire disasters in modern U.S. history," stated AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist **Jonathan Porter**. "Hurricane-force winds sent flames ripping through neighborhoods filled with multi-million-dollar homes. The devastation left behind is heartbreaking and the economic toll is staggering. To put this into perspective, the total damage and economic loss from this wildfire disaster could reach nearly 4 percent of the annual GDP of the state of California."

J.P. Morgan analysts have projected that fire-related insured losses could climb as high as $20 billion, up from their initial estimate of $13 billion. In the Palisades community alone, where the median list price was $4.72 million as of December 2024, according to data from Realtor.com®, there were $6 billion in potential claims.

But the trouble is, the FAIR Plan offeed by California to insure those uninsurable through a traditional carrier, has only about $700 million in cash, according to testimony given to the California State Assembly last year. This raises concerns that the state-backed insurer could become insolvent.

FAIR Plan spokesperson **Hilary McLean** warned that it could take years to accurately calculate total losses from the Los Angeles fires, but she stressed that the insurer anticipates being able to pay out claims related to the disaster.

A call into the Montana Insurance Commissioner's office revealed that Montana doesn't track non-renewal of homeowner policies.

Perhaps they should, as insurance carriers seem to have a good track record of predicting when to pull out before a calamity strikes.

In addition, some conspiracy folks cite proposition 13 as the reason why LA blundered with fire protection of the area. Proposition 13 was passed in CA in 1978 and held the assessed value of a home at the purchase price. In Pacific Palisade, where the majority of the losses occurred, many of the homeowners had lived in their homes for decades meaning they were taxed at rates well below market value. Once those homes are rebuilt, they will be assessed at current day values, which will dramatically increase property taxes, once again making homeownership unaffordable and causing many to move out of the area.

This is a grave concern across the country because catastrophes in other states impact insurance rates across the country-especially in similarly forested areas like Montana.

"We're one bad fire season away from complete insolvency," said CA *Assemblymember Jim Wood (Healdsburg) at a 3/13/24 Assembly Insurance Committee meeting*

The costs for property insurers in states like California, Colorado and Montana have been going up rapidly in recent years. Inflation, labor shortages, and supply chain problems that increase rebuilding costs are playing a role. At the same time, more frequent large wildfires are increasing risk and losses. As a result, insurers are relying more on their own insurance (aka "reinsurance") to cover payouts, and those prices are going up, with fewer companies willing to (re)insure fire risk.

Why, you might ask, don't insurance companies just raise their rates to cover these additional costs? The problem is that they can't. They can't raise them high enough, and they can't raise them fast enough. The Montana Commissioner of Insurance and Securities (CSI), James Brown, reviews any proposals to change rates and those reviews often take a year or more. Even then, insurers aren't allowed to include certain costs in their rate filings. They cannot include the cost of reinsurance, which is growing bigger each year. Nor can they include the increasing risks of weather calamities and fires, since they are only permitted to use backwards-facing models. These restrictions were put in place to control price increases. Reinsurance can reflect costs outside of Montana, which we don't want Montanans to be responsible for paying; and proprietary climate change models could lead to unjustified high rates.

As insurers struggle to adjust rates, their reserves are dropping. When reserves go down past a certain point, guidelines require that insurers cut back on policies, whether or not those policies are in wildfire areas. The result has been a widespread withdrawal from the market of many of the largest insurers.

Indeed, some homeowners routinely see a surge in premium rates charged by insurers with each annual renewal; and studies have shown that Montana ranks high in the nation for average cost of homeowner's insurance policies; Over

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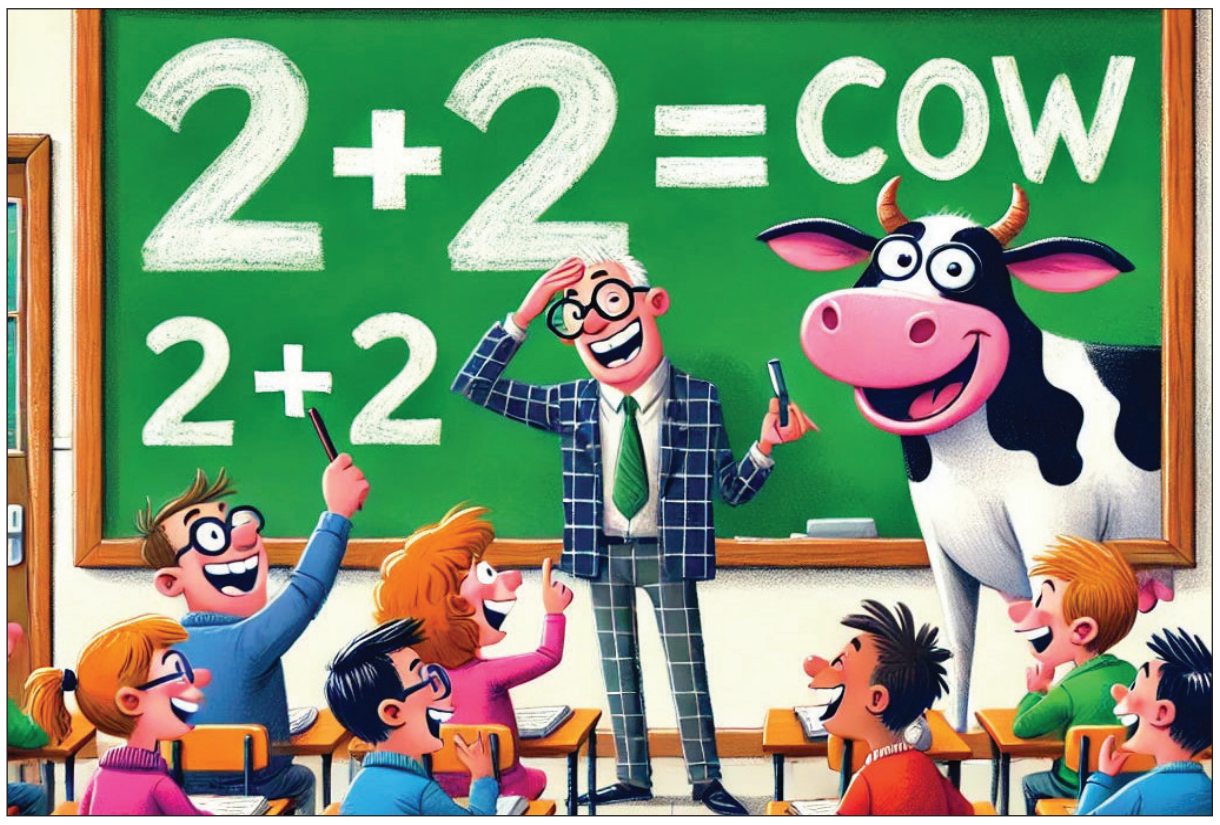
Would Your Marriage Survive 25% Reliability? Neither Will Our Energy Systems

WRITTEN BY
Will Thompson



Imagine sending your kids to a school where the teachers only show up 25% of the time. Math class? Not today. Science lab? Maybe next week, if you're lucky. Your kids grow up thinking two plus two equals cow because their education is as patchy as their teachers' attendance. It's absurd, right? Now, here's the real kicker: Why are so many seemingly OK with this level of inefficiency when it comes to renewable energy systems?

Renewable energy facilities, like solar and wind farms, operate at 25%-30% efficiency (in theory). That means they only work a fraction of the time, but we're expected to trust them as our main source of power. Let's explore this foolishness with some snarky comparisons to things we definitely wouldn't put up with in rural communities and farming life.

1. The Inefficient Tractor - A Farmer's Worst Nightmare

Picture this: You've got hay to bale, crops to plant, and a full day ahead. But your tractor—your lifeline in the field—won't start. Why? Because it only works 25% of the time.

So, what's the solution? A backup tractor, of course! You dust off "Bessie," the old relic parked behind the barn. For whatever reason, tractors always seem to end up with names. Some are logical—like calling an ancient, barely-working one "Old Reliable." Others, well… let's just say the names aren't suitable for polite company.

Bessie fires up with a cough and a puff of black smoke. She chugs along just long enough to get one small job done. But wait—she's running on fumes, and her best days are decades behind her. You finish one pass of the field before she sputters out, leaving you stranded with half a hayfield and a growing headache.

The real problem hasn't changed: Your main tractor still doesn't start, and now you're leaning on a backup that's just as unreliable. It's a temporary fix for a long-term issue—a Band-Aid on a broken bone.

That's the reality of relying on a backup system for renewable energy. A battery energy storage system might keep things running for a short while, but it can't support the grid indefinitely. The underlying issue of inefficiency remains.

2. The Lazy Employee - A Drain on the Farm

Now imagine hiring a farmhand who clocks in for just 2 hours of an 8-hour day. Of course, if you're a farmer, the thought of an 8-hour day probably made you laugh. An 8-hour workday is a luxury—more like a vacation—than reality on the farm. But let's pretend, for argument's sake, that farming could ever be confined to such a tidy little schedule.

This hypothetical farmhand still shows up late, leaves early, and only gets a small fraction of the work done. They happily take a full day's wages though (who wouldn't)! They claim they're doing their best, but their "best" leaves 70% of the work undone.

So, what do you do? You bring in a temp worker, because, let's face it—the work has to get done somehow! Maybe the temp can finish repairing the fence or handle feeding the livestock. And sure, the temp gets the job done… for now. But temp workers aren't cheap, they're not permanent, and you can't always depend on them to be available when you need them. When their contract ends, or they simply don't show up, you're stuck right back where you started, still dealing with inefficiency and unfinished work.

It's the same story with renewable energy systems. Backup power might save the day occasionally, but it's not cheap, it's not permanent, and it doesn't fix the underlying inefficiency. Why should we put up with that when the stakes are so high?

3. The No-Show Teacher - A Disservice to Future Farmers

Let's say you send your kids to a school where the teachers show up only 25% of the time. Math class? Not today. Science lab? Try again next week, if you're lucky. Your kids grow up thinking two plus two equals cow because their education is as patchy as their teachers' attendance.

You bring in a tutor to fill in the gaps. For a while, it seems like a decent solution. But tutors are expensive, and they're not a permanent fix. Eventually, you're stuck with a school system that's still failing your kids—and the tutor can't do much when the structure itself is broken.

This is exactly what it feels like to rely on renewable energy systems that only work when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. The frustration, the wasted effort, and the lack of reliability are all the same—you're stuck solving a problem that shouldn't exist in the first place.

4. The Teenage Chore Dodger - A Household Headache

Now picture this: You assign your teenage son or daughter a simple chore—say, taking out the trash. You remind them. You remind them again. You even leave a sticky note on the fridge. And yet, the trash is still sitting there three days later, overflowing like a small landfill.

In rural homes, respect and discipline are key character traits. These values are instilled from an early age, and most kids grow up understanding the importance of hard work and pulling their weight. That said, teenagers are still teenagers. No matter how well they've been raised, simple things like this will—and do—happen… on occasion, at least. Maybe they were distracted, forgot, or just decided it wasn't a priority.

You're left wondering how something as basic as taking out the trash could possibly slip through the cracks. Eventually, your patience runs out, and you step in to do it yourself because, let's face it, the job has to get done. It's frustrating, but you chalk it up to one of those moments that come with raising kids, knowing they'll eventually grow out of it.

Sound familiar? It's the same kind of irritation you feel when dealing with unreliable energy systems. Just like you can't consistently count on your teenager to get their chores done without a reminder (or three), you can't rely on an energy source that only works 25%-30% of the time. And unlike your teenager, renewable energy systems won't "grow out of it" or suddenly become dependable. You're stuck dealing with the same inefficiency over and over again, and there's no real backup to step in when it matters most.

The Broader Absurdity

If we wouldn't tolerate these inefficiencies in our daily lives, why do we accept them in our energy systems? Every farmer knows the value of reliability. You wouldn't buy a tractor that only worked 30% of the time, rely on a school where teachers barely show up, or expect your teenager to take out the trash without constant reminders.

But that's exactly what we're doing with renewable energy. We're investing in systems that leave us high and dry—or, worse, cold and dark—at the moments we need them most. And while battery systems might help for a short while, they're nothing more than a temporary patch on a problem that requires real solutions.

A Common-Sense Solution?

Let's stop pretending this makes sense. Instead, let's demand energy systems that work as hard as we do. Systems that are dependable, efficient, and built to last. But for argument's sake, let's consider a sort-of common-sense solution to the problem.

If one tractor only works 25% of the time, why not just buy four tractors? That way, when one decides to take a break (which it inevitably will), you've got three more to pick up the slack. Problem solved, right? Well, not quite.

First off, tractors aren't cheap. Having four tractors on hand just to ensure you can rely on one at any given time would be outrageously expensive—enough to bankrupt most farming operations. But hey, maybe the government could step in and pay 40%-50% of the cost to make it feasible. Sound familiar? That's essentially how renewable energy projects are funded today—massive subsidies to prop up systems that don't work efficiently in the first place.

And even with four tractors, you're still left juggling inefficiencies. Maintenance, fuel, and storage for that many machines would be a logistical nightmare, not to mention a drain on resources. The reality is, no farmer would ever consider this a "solution." It's a patchwork fix to a problem that requires real innovation, not just throwing more money (or tractors) at it.

What we really need is energy infrastructure that delivers consistent, reliable base load power. The kind of power you can count on every second of the day, no matter the weather or time of year. Base load power is the backbone of modern society—the energy equivalent of a tractor that starts every single time you need it. It's the foundation that allows homes, businesses, and farms to function without constant worry or costly backups.

Wrapping It All Up…

Next time someone tells you to embrace renewable energy, ask them this: If they had a tractor that only worked 25% of the time, would they buy two or three more just because the government would pay for them? When they inevitably hesitate, give them a snarky smile and remind them that backup solutions are just temporary crutches.

And while we're on the subject of reliability, I ask you: Would your wife be "OK" with you forgetting things like her birthday, Valentine's Day, Sweetest Day, or—heaven forbid—your anniversary three out of every four years? I think not. That kind of inefficiency wouldn't just strain your relationship—it might end it. On the bright side, though, missing those key dates might give you a chance to spend a few nights in the barn—just you, the critters, and that unreliable tractor you've been meaning to fix.

Because out here in the real world, 25% efficiency just doesn't cut it. And if we wouldn't tolerate it in our marriages, our farms, or our families, we sure shouldn't settle for it when it comes to powering our lives.

The True Cost of Renewables

Are Utility-Scale Energy Projects Really Worth It?

WRITTEN BY
JW Thompson

Imagine this: you're standing on your family's land—acreage your grandparents fought tooth and nail to clear, till, and nurture. It's the land that's put food on your table, paid for your kids' braces, and kept your boots muddy and your soul clean. Now picture trading that land for rows of solar panels or wind turbines because someone far away thinks they're saving the planet. Sounds noble, right?

Not so fast. At first glance, renewable energy developers seem to offer a golden ticket, but when you dig deeper, the deal might stink worse than a week-old manure pile. Let's break it down: how do utility-scale renewable energy projects really affect landowners, neighbors, and communities?

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1. For Landowners: A Payday with Strings Attached

a. Developers will come knocking with promises of cash so good it'll make your head spin faster than one of their turbines. Here's the pitch:

   i. The Lease Payment Windfall: They'll likely offer $1,500 to $2,000 per acre per year. For a 100 MW solar farm, needing up to 700 acres, that's $1.05 to $1.4 million annually. Compare that to farming profits, which average $50 to $150 per acre per year (USDA Economic Research Service, 2023). Sounds like a jackpot, right?

   But don't grab your pen just yet. Developers don't include a footnote for the long-term costs. And many times, they'll sweeten the pot with a "sign now" bonus—offering to slide across the kitchen table a check for $10,000, $20,000, $50,000, or more if you agree immediately. It's designed to dazzle you into making a split-second decision without fully understanding the ramifications.

1. Locked-In Land Use: Once the panels go up, your land is out of commission for 20 to 30 years. No grazing, no planting, no pivoting when crop prices spike. It's like locking your barn door and handing someone else the key.

   But here's the kicker: a land lease for renewable energy developments essentially eliminates all your rights to the land for generations. You no longer get to decide how it's used, what's grown, or whether it can return to its original purpose. Even if you want to pass the land down to your children, they'll be inheriting a contract they had no say in signing. It's no longer your farm—it's a utility company's industrial site with your name on the tax bill.

   And it gets worse. Many renewable energy leases include first-right-of-refusal clauses, giving the developer the option to buy the land before anyone else if you decide—or are forced—to sell. Upon your death, your family may not even have the chance to keep the land. The legacy you've worked so hard to build could end up in the hands of a corporation instead of being passed down to your children, as most farmers dream of doing.

   Leasing your land for renewables is like renting your prized tractor to a neighbor who promises to return it someday—but doesn't mention it'll come back with flat tires, a busted engine, and no guarantee it'll ever run the same again. Worse, when it breaks, your kids might not even be able to reclaim it.

2. Reclamation Risks: When the lease ends, guess who's stuck cleaning up? Unless the developer offers a reclamation bond, you could be paying for panel and turbine removal, soil restoration, and infrastructure teardown. You might as well toss that lease money straight into a silo fire.

   Now, here's the twist: although many developments require decommissioning bonds, these bonds are only as "strong" as the company issuing them. If the bond is too small, poorly structured, or outright inaccessible when the time comes, who pays for decommissioning?

   Maybe the owner of the facility will handle it—until they declare bankruptcy, that is. At that point, the responsibility shifts to the landowner. And when the costs prove insurmountable (think hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars), the landowner might face bankruptcy too. Then, who's left holding the bag? The community, through taxes or other public funding, gets stuck footing the bill for cleanup.

   A decommissioning bond from a shaky developer is like handing your neighbor a piece of baling twine and asking them to tow your broken tractor—it's not going to hold when the pressure's on.

2. For Developers: Big Money, Small Rules

If you think these developers are just altruistic tree-huggers, think again. They're in it for the money—and the perks that come with being "green."

a. Engineering and Predevelopment Costs: Developers hire engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contractors to handle everything from design to materials to installation. Their costs make up 10-20% of the project (National Renewable Energy Laboratory, 2023). For a $10 million project, that's $1-2 million. And who foots part of that bill? You do, via generous tax subsidies.

b. Construction and Equipment: They'll spend $1-2 million per MW on construction (Energy Information Administration, 2021), but don't expect local job creation. Most workers come from specialized out-of-town crews, like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). And while IBEW recently signed a national agreement with renewable developers, the boots on the ground often aren't from your neck of the woods. See the agreement at https://www.ibew.org/media-center/Articles/23Daily/2310/231014_three.

c. Special Privileges: This part will really grind your gears: developers frequently get zoning exemptions. If you wanted to build a shop or housing development, you'd be mired in red tape. But call it a "solar farm," and the rules magically vanish. Local input? Often ignored.

Worse, some organizations, like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), actively advocate for the use of eminent domain to force renewable energy projects onto landowners who refuse to participate. For an example of this advocacy, visit https://www.ibew.org/articles/11ElectricalWorker/EW1107/03.0711.html.

Granting eminent domain powers to renewable energy developers is like giving a neighbor the right to bulldoze your barn because they believe their new driveway is more important than your livelihood.

3. For Neighbors: The Hidden Costs of Living Nearby

Even if you don't lease your land, these projects can still hit you like a runaway combine.

a. Higher Taxes: Renewable projects often get tax abatements, meaning they're removed from the tax rolls. The bond or levy your community passed to fund schools or fire departments? It still needs the same revenue. Guess who makes up the difference? You and your neighbors, through higher property taxes.

b. Decreased Property Values: Your view of rolling hills and grazing cattle might be replaced by rows of industrial panels or turbines. Developers claim their projects don't hurt property values, but most studies they cite focus on much smaller installations—or are conducted by consultants with ties to the renewable industry. And when independent studies say otherwise? Developers muddy the waters with half-truths, counting on people not to dig deeper.

c. Community Division: Fracturing Relationships: Here's the gut punch: these projects don't just strain wallets—they strain relationships.

   When developers roll into town, some landowners see dollar signs, while others see a threat to their way of life. Families split over decisions. Lifelong friends argue. Developers, with their hedgy answers and misinformation, only add fuel to the fire. Instead of being transparent, they dodge tough questions, leaving communities divided and distrustful.

   It's like inviting a fox into your henhouse, only to have it slink away while you and your neighbor argue over whose chickens are missing.

Think Twice Before You Lease

Before signing anything, ask yourself:

- What's the long-term impact? Will your land still be farmable or usable for

(continued on page 14A)

(Palisades Fire from page 2A)
Vice President of Gas Engineering, switched to Senior Vice President of Electric Operations in July 2022, and left the firm in December 2023.

Sources told DailyMail.com that since her hiring at LADWP, Quiñones oversaw the shutdown and emptying of a reservoir in the Pacific Palisades during brushfire season. Experts say the shutdown meant firefighters battling the current Palisades Fire ran out of water faster.

The Santa Ynez Reservoir is designed to hold 117 million gallons of drinking water. But it was taken offline in recent months to repair a tear in its cover that exposed the water and potentially impacted its drinkability. The shutdown was first publicly reported by the LA Times on Friday, January 10th. Former DWP general manager Martin Adams told the paper that having the Santa Ynez reservoir would have helped fight the Palisades Fire that wiped out most of the Pacific Palisades neighborhood this week.

'Would Santa Ynez have helped? Yes, to some extent. Would it have saved the day? I don't think so,' Adams said. He said the crucial reservoir had been offline 'for a while' before the fires, but didn't know the precise date.

But a source in the LA Fire Department (LAFD) told DailyMail.com that DWP officials told them 'had it not been closed they probably would have been ok and had enough water for the fire.'

As the fast-moving fire progressed into neighborhoods and consumed one block after another, fire crews were faced with another problem: fire hydrants had little to no water.

Fire agencies are investigating whether downed Southern California Edison utility equipment played a role in igniting the Hurst fire near Sylmar.

Why did the hydrants run out?

By Tuesday afternoon, one of the LA Department of Water and Power water tanks that service the Palisades area ran out of water, according to Janisse Quiñones, chief executive and chief engineer.

Three tanks that each hold a capacity of 117 million gallons should maintain enough water pressure that allows water to travel uphill through pipes and to fire hydrants in the neighborhoods.

But water pressure began to decrease because of the heavy water use, LA Department of Water and Power officials said.

The second ran out at approximately 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday and the last tank ran out and 'went dry' at about 3 a.m. Wednesday, according to Janisse Quiñones, LADWP chief executive and chief engineer.

At a press conference shortly after the fires envelope Pacific Palisades, Quiñones said, "We had tremendous demand on our system in the Palisades. We pushed the system to the extreme-four times the normal demand was seen for 15 hours straight, which lowered our water pressure."

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A well-connected former LAFD senior officer told DailyMail.com that lack of water was already a 'common' problem, exacerbated by DWP failing to fix cutoff fire hydrants.

The Liberty Bell contacted the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) but the LADWP did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Per the former LAFD officer that spoke to the DailyMail.com, "Yearly, the fire department goes out and checks every hydrant. For my entire career we would do this once a year then send in a report to our Hydrant Unit with all the problems we encountered. Year after year the same hydrants that had problems were not fixed. One example that comes to mind were the hydrants by Palisades High School on Temescal Canyon. They were dry many times we checked them. DWP knew they had problems and it would take months to fix them. It's a City-wide known problem with DWP. Last year the yearly hydrant checks were given back to DWP because the firefighters literally are too busy on calls. I would be willing to bet DWP didn't do this. I would love to see if they have the documents."

Also reported by the DailyMail.com, "A current senior LAFD official also told DailyMail.com that some hydrants in the Palisades were not working when desperate firefighters tried to use them this week, and that they had not been fixed because of budget cuts by LA Mayor Karen Bass."

DailyMail.com exclusively obtained a memo to LAFD 'top brass' sent on Monday January 6, the day before the Palisades Fire began, revealing demands from Bass to cut the fire department's budget further, by 49 million, on top of $17.6 million of cuts already voted on by the city council.

The Los Angeles Daily News previously reported that the city's overall spending on its fire department increased by $53 million in the fiscal year 2024-25 which runs to this July, but that $7 million of their budget was put in a separate fund for personnel while pay negotiations were still being hashed out, leading to the $17.6 million accounting shortfall.

Department veterans told DailyMail.com that the net effect of the budget machinations has meant less firefighters on the ground for years.

The under-fire LADWP was only just recovering from a series of major scandals, including in 2022 when its former General Manager David Wright was sentenced to six years in federal prison for bribery.

Wright took bribes from lawyer Paul Paradis to help secure a $30 million, three-year, no-bid LADWP contract for the lawyer's company, according to federal prosecutors.

Compounding the corruption, Paradis was also taking nearly $2.2 million in illegal kickbacks from a complex scheme where he simultaneously represented LADWP and residents suing the department over a billing debacle. LADWP implemented a new billing system in 2013 that inaccurately inflated utility bills, sparking class-action lawsuits.

Paradis represented the city as Special Counsel, but was simultaneously representing claimants in the billing debacle, and colluded to get a favorable payout for himself and clients. He was sentenced to three years in prison in 2023.

Extreme dry weather conditions due to a prolonged drought, dry vegetation and powerful Santa Ana winds that reached up to 80 mph in some areas this week proved to be the 'perfect storm' for the worst fire the area has seen in more than two decades.

Fire officials believe the fires started in a back garden, but residents have told DailyMail.com they saw suspicious individuals in the area where smoke was first spotted.

Sources told DailyMail.com the Sant Ynez Reservoir was actually empty when the Palisades Fire began because it was closed for repairs. A source in the LA Fire Department told DailyMail.com that DWP officials told them 'had it not been closed they probably would have been ok and had enough water for the fire.' Former LADWP general manager Martin Adams told the LA Times if the reservoir was operating, it could have extended water pressure that first night.

LA County and LA City officials are facing even further scrutiny after residents pointed to a decision to suspend the annual fire hydrant testing for the 2024-25 fiscal year because of 'fiscal challenges which are likely due to Mayor Bass reducing their budget.

LA Fire sources told DailyMail.com that city-wide fire hydrant testing was supposed to take place last January and usually took three days.

'You have to make sure these hydrants work, and yes, it absolutely would've made a difference in fighting all of these fires,' the source said. 'We've had some issues with hydrants and that 's why it's important to test them annually so we can tell LADWP to fix it. They can't fix it unless they know it's broken, and it was our job to do that but that [testing] was suspended.'

Sources also told the DailyMail.com that

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(continued on page 11A)

(Palisades Fire from page 10A)
morale in the LA City and County fire departments are 'at an all-time low' as they faced severe budget cuts.

In the meantime, the city's police budget increased by $126 million.

Why was the fire department budget slashed?

Records show the city's fire department budget was cut more than $17.5 million just seven months before the Palisades fire.

Mayor Laren Bass signed the budget allotting $819.64 million for the fire department. In the previous fiscal year, the fire department's budget was $837.2 million.

In a statement in June, Bass said the cuts were a necessary 'reset.'

The National Weather Service in LA issued numerous warnings about the dangerous weather conditions days leading up to the deadly Palisades fire. Why weren't more fire departments alerted in neighboring communities and at the federal level to prepare for the possibility of wildfires?

Firefighters with the LA Fire Department told the DailyMail.com they were not asked to mobilize until it was too late. Sources with the LA Fire Department said they did not receive a call to 'pre-deploy' until Tuesday morning. 'Usually, when there is a high wind warning, we staff extra fire engines to be ready to go,' the source told the DailyMail.com. 'There should've been a pre-deploy at least a day before. They didn't do that so we went home.'

Sources added that once many of the firefighters came back, some were once again called off by Wednesday, January 8th because there were not enough operable rigs.

'It would've made a huge difference, having 30 to 40 more engines they could have fully staffed. We could've done water shuttles into the fire, but when you don't have the apparatus, you can't do that.'

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LAFD Chief Kristin Crowley wrote in a December 4 memo to the Board of Fire Commissioners that the budget cuts 'have adversely affected the Department's ability to maintain core operations.'

She added that the $7 million reduction in overtime hours limited the Department's capacity 'to prepare for, train for and respond to large-scale emergencies'. It also affected the Department's other duties, including inspecting homes for brush clearance inspections on residential homes.

LAFD Chief Kristine Crowley warned added budget cuts to her department's coffers would be detrimental. The DailyMail.com received an exclusive memo written by Los Angeles Mayor Bass, just a week prior to the devasting fires, where she demanded an additional $49 million dollar budget cut from the Los Angeles Fire Department.

"The department now has fewer firefighters and medics than it did 15 years ago, despite emergency calls surging by over 50% during the same period."

The memo said: 'The LAFD is still going through a FY [financial year] 2024/2025 $48.8 million budget reduction exercise with the CAO [City Attorney's Office],' the document said.

The DailyMail.com reported, "The only way to provide a cost savings would be to close as many as 16 fire stations (not resources, fire stations); this equates to at least one fire station per City Council District."

Sources told the DailyMail.com that firefighters across the county are fed up. "We are running a skeleton crew every single day,' a veteran firefighter said. 'They didn't pre-deploy anybody and they didn't hire because they don't want to spend the money. We can't sustain 2,000 calls a day and successfully fight a wildfire. And no one does a damn thing because they don't give a s--t."

People fleeing the Palisades Fire abandoned their vehicles on Sunset Boulevard as flames surrounded the two-lane road

Police hastily told the motorists to abandon their cars and the residents - many who are elderly - struggled to walk down the road.

By 3 p.m., bulldozers were brought in to push dozens of abandoned cars on Palisades Drive so firetrucks could drive up the hillside where the fire was raging.

By the end of the night, the fire had already consumed hundreds of homes, businesses and other structures. Entire communities once known for posh shops and restaurants and multimillion dollar home were left unrecognizable.

Actor and comedian Billy Crystal wrote a heartbreaking statement on their loss.

'Janice and I lived in our home since 1979,' Crystal wrote.

'We raised our children and grandchildren here. Every inch of our house was filled with love. Beautiful memories that can't be taken away.

'We are heartbroken of course but with the love of our children and friends we will get through this.'

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble —*Psalm 46:1*

Subsidy Splash, Energy Crash

Uncover the reasons why energy subsidies don't work and why legislators should stop giving them

WRITTEN BY
Paige Lambermont
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New data recently released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) shows a decrease in wind power production in 2023. Despite record highs in installed wind capacity and continually rising subsidies production is falling.

Thanks to these subsidies, including the longstanding Production Tax Credit (PTC) and Investment Tax Credit (ITC), and the extensions that these credits received in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), subsidies for wind power have seen a dramatic increase over the last decade. The IRA extended these credits through 2025, and replaces them with the new, but similar, Clean Energy PTC and Clean Energy ITC through 2032. It also added provisions to provide even larger subsidies for projects that meet "Environmental Justice" requirements. All of this together will maintain, and increase, both the scope of subsidies for wind, and the impact that those subsidies have on the overall market for electricity.

As a general matter, lawmakers should stop subsidizing energy sources. To protect reliability, lawmakers should look to repeal the IRA extensions of wind and solar tax credits as a first step toward repairing the damage that these subsidies have done to electricity markets.

Will this money do any good for the power grid? Will added investment


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in renewable sources, particularly wind, lead to any increase in the amount of wind power generated? And will that capacity increase or decrease the resiliency of the grid?

The answer to all of the preceding questions is an emphatic "no" and recent reality bears this out.

The highest installed wind capacity on record was last year, with nearly 150 gigawatts of installed wind capacity in the US.

Even with this record capacity last year, there was also a decline in power generated from wind for the first time. There was 2.1 percent less wind power generated in 2023 than in 2022. This was in part due to slower wind speeds that year, an inherent flaw of wind power. The intermittency of the source also means that sometimes wind power is unavailable when demand is high, but available when it is not, which can also result in less wind power being used.

These aren't problems that subsidy dollars can solve, they're inherent to the technology. Despite this, lawmakers have continually tried throwing money at the problem. From 2016 to 2022, the federal government spent approximately $18.7 billion on subsidies for wind power alone. This is a massive amount of money. It's even more considerable given that wind's intermittency heavily limits its benefit to reliability.

During that period, wind subsidies were much higher than the subsidies for any of the conventional power sources: natural gas, coal, and nuclear. Specifically, the wind subsidies were about 2.5 times greater than both coal subsidies and refined coal subsidies, and greater than both coal and refined coal subsidies combined. The wind subsidies were also about double the subsidies for natural gas and petroleum liquids and about 6.5 times greater than nuclear subsidies.

Renewables received 46 percent of overall power subsidies, despite constituting a very small portion of overall power generation.

This isn't subsidies per kilowatt hour of generation. It's total subsidies. If it were per kilowatt hour of generation, the disparity would be even more extreme given how much more output conventional sources have. To be clear, policymakers shouldn't be increasing the subsidies for reliable sources to account for this disparity. The way to fix power markets is to subsidize everything less (ideally not at all). The solution to grid reliability problems is certainly not to subsidize the least reliable sources the most.

Decreasing wind generation makes wind's power production limitations more obvious. It also emphasizes what many reliability advocates have been saying for years: government meddling in electricity markets in favor of unreliable sources will have consequences for reliability as money is funneled away from what works and toward what does not.

MDU Ratepayers are Mad as Hell!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WRITTEN BY
Renee Pirtz

I want to start by saying everyone who is reading this letter to the editor (LTE) needs to show up on January 28, 2025 at the next Public Service Commission (PSC) Meeting in Helena. For too long our central committees and activists have been focused on the legislature or courts and have overlooked an extremely important part of our government-the PSC.

Helena is a long way to go for members located on the eastern side of the state, where many of us are ranchers and farmers. It is especially so when all we get in return is a couple minutes in front of the commission where we don't even get to ask questions and get answers. While I am at it, I should be allowed to ask questions at the end of the mtg, as much as, in the beginning. This might be intentional on the part of the PSC to discourage members from showing up and voicing concerns and learning what is really happening while we work hard back at home and get stuck paying higher utility bills.

Afterall, we, your constituents, pay your salaries and we should have the opportunity to ask you questions and get answers so we can know if you know a thing or two and for us to be able to determine if it is worth re-electing you. By limiting our ability to interact with you during meetings, meaning you never answer our questions, you are not acting like a government body that really cares about doing a good job on our behalf. When we, the residents of Montana are the ones expected to pay the bill, why can't we ask you the questions that deserve answers during your meeting, or is it 'Our" meeting (especially at the end of the meeting)?

Most Montana residents don't know or care to be bothered to know how their utility company operates and why our service rates are what they are. For those reading this, here's how the regulatory compact works not only between the PSC and the utility companies, but also between the PSC and the consumer or residents of Montana.

In a particular service area, a utility is granted a monopoly; in that area, it is the sole electricity or natural gas provider. It is allowed to charge its customers whatever rates are necessary to cover costs, and provide for a reasonable rate of return on investments (aka profit).

In exchange, the utility has to make investments sufficient to provide reliable, low-cost power to any customer in the area who wants it, with minimal "line losses" (i.e., "leakage" of power from power lines or gas pipelines). To ensure the utility does not abuse its power, the Montana PSC monitors its activities and has to sign off on its rates.

That's the bargain: the utility provides low-cost, reliable power-in exchange, it gets a captive customer base. First, note that this arrangement looks almost nothing like a "free market" as envisioned by classical economists. These are entities legally protected from competition, charging government-approved prices, receiving guaranteed returns. It is the most Soviet of economic sectors. (Keep this in mind the next time someone glibly refers to "the market" in discussions of gas, wind or solar.)

There are a few key things to note about the regulatory compact.

The utility makes money not primarily by selling electricity or providing natural gas, but by making investments and receiving returns on them. If it builds more power plants and power lines, it makes more money (the money is in the pipelines and transmission lines today. Thanks to all the federal money invested in renewable energy utilities are building more and more transmission lines to get the energy produced to where it will be used).

Add these together and you see the basic incentive structure at work. In most economic sectors, businesses live in fear of competing businesses coming in and providing customers with a better value proposition. They must be vigilant, cut costs, and innovate. That is the power of markets.

But utilities do not fear competition. Their customers cannot live without their product or purchase it elsewhere. Their profits are guaranteed so long as they can justify their rates to a Public Service Commission. All they need to do to increase profits is to build more stuff — more power plants, more substations, more power lines, more.

When the regulatory compact was established, this made perfect sense. The demand for power was inexorably rising and there was a need to scale up rapidly. Given all the *un*regulated monopolies at the time, the regulatory compact was actually fairly progressive — at least it provided explicitly for public oversight.

But make no mistake: it was designed to electrify the country, to enable more people in more places to find more uses for electricity. Demand grew so fast that utilities were proposing, getting approval for, and making huge investments right and left, as fast as they could. And everything got bigger. The mania for gigantism reached its peak in the '70s, with the nuclear craze. Finally, a technology powerful enough to fuel the meteoric rise in electricity consumption that was going to last forever. (Ahem.)

Now fast-forward to the present. The regulatory compact remains the same, the incentive structure it created remains the same, but circumstances in the U.S. have changed in two big, overarching ways.

The first to emerge, which began around 2010, is that demand for utilities' services slowed. Why? Some of it is merely the "offshoring" of industrial activity (we lost a lot of manufacturing to other countries like China). But a substantial chunk is the recent explosion of energy-efficiency technologies and investments. Alongside that is the maturation of what's called "demand response," the ability to shift electricity use forward or backward in time in response to price signals. (Demand response doesn't reduce total load, but it can reduce *peak* load; utilities have to invest/build enough to meet peak load, so if you reduce peak load, you reduce needed investments.)

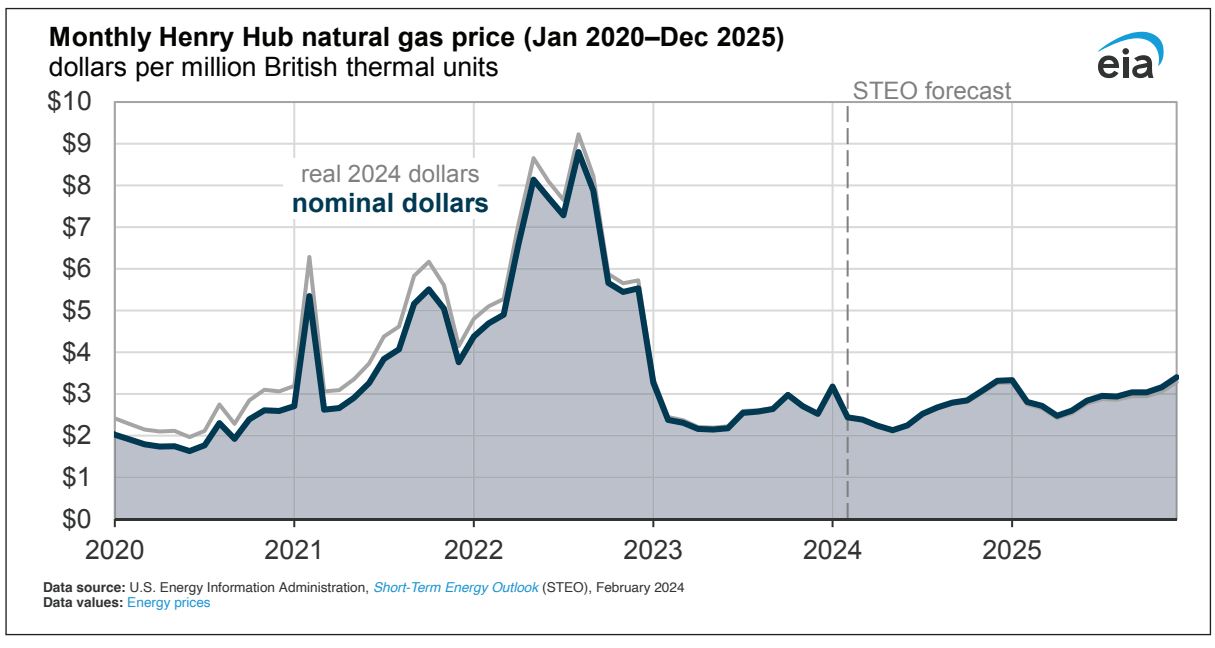
Alongside *that*, individuals now have the power to generate their own electricity with solar panels and other distributed generation technologies. Utilities do not own that distributed generation; it's an investment upon which they receive no returns. And it represents a reduction in demand for what they are selling, a reduction in use of their grid infrastructure, and a reduction in the need for future power infrastructure.

For all these reasons, many energy nerds believe that electricity demand in the U.S. will never again rise as fast as it did this century, and might even plateau. But remember, utilities are in the midst of paying off large, 20-plus-year investments. If they get less than expected from some customers, they have to charge the other customers more in order to get the same rate of return. They do not like that one bit (nor do the other customers).

Furthermore, the unpredictable rise of all these disruptive technologies casts their future investments into doubt. In the long term, they face the threat of lower profits and, well, shrinkage. They don't like that one bit either.

And that is perverse, because the other broad change since the early 1900s is a recognition by many people with the power to implement legislation, of the threat of climate change and their focus on the radical reduction of fossil-fuel use. Maybe this was part of the push to move everything to electric (electric vehicles, heat pumps, water heaters, washers and dryers etc.).

As a society, we *need* energy efficiency and demand response. We *need* distributed energy from all sources. All those things are to the good, economically and ecologically. Yet utilities have every incentive to oppose them, as they are direct threats to their familiar, comfortable business model, which has survived nearly a century unchanged.



MDU has 78,000 natural gas residential ratepayers, many of whom are struggling ranchers and farmers and senior citizens on fixed incomes and low-income working-class families. Prairie County where I live has a 22.3% poverty rate.

MDU has a market cap or net worth of $3.68 billion a valuation is $6.06 billion and 203.89 million shares outstanding.

A fellow Montanan commented at the last PSC meeting, that: MDU Resources paid dividends of $0.52 per share in the past year. Was that record profit because the price of natural gas BTUs went down from the highs of a few years back? If that is the case, why aren't ratepayers getting a lower rate instead of shareholders getting windfall dividends? Don't lower costs get factored in? If they did, don't we, the ratepayer, actually deserve a rate cut instead of an increase?

There are 452 institutional investors-- the 3 largest being the Vanguard Group, Blackrock Inc. and Corvex Management.

Those three received the following:

Vanguard Group = 19.72 million shares x 0.52 per share this last year = $10.25 million

Blackrock Inc. = 18.54 million shares x 0.52 = $9.64 million

Corvex Management = 10.15 million shares x 0.52 = $5.27 million

It was noted that these three institutional investors own less than a quarter of the shares of MDU. Therefore, the full amount of dividends paid comes to approximately 4 times that amount or over $100 million. (Source: https://www.nasdaq.com/market-activity/stocks/mdu/dividend-history)

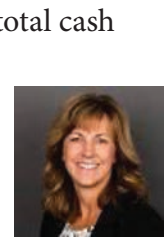
At that same PSC meeting, MDU claimed if they don't get this interim increase, they won't be able to do scheduled maintenance. MDU says it is only a $5 dollar a month rate increase, but with 78,000 customers that amounts to almost $4.7 million a year.

According to the Consumer Counsel, in their rate increase request MDU has included short-term incentive compensation, executive incentive compensation, board of director related expenses and investor relations expenses all in their requirements. So, this is not about doing badly needed maintenance. They clearly have access to the capital. Look at what these four executives at Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU) Resources Group earn in compensation. In 2022, the CEO of MDU Resources Group earned $5.26 million, which was 54 times more than the median MDU employee and almost 280 times the median income of a Prairie County resident.

Executive salaries

David L. Goodin
President and CEO of MDU Resources Group, received $3,519,469 in total cash compensation

Jeffrey S. Thiede
President and CEO of Construction Services Segment, received $1,155,138 in total cash compensation



Nicole A. Kivisto
President and CEO of Electric and Natural Gas Distribution Segments, received $1,395,625 in total cash compensation

Jason L. Vollmer
Vice President, CFO and Treasurer, received $1,325,631 in total cash compensation

Nothing has changed since the PSC had a vote on this interim rate increase in October except the elections are now over, MDU shareholders got their dividends -- and ratepayers got their winter heating bills.

Commissioner Pinocci is the only one that voted down the rate increase both before and after the election. Commissioner Pinocci's district is MDU's and my district and the district affected by this rate hike. Commissioner Bukacek doesn't have any constituents from MDU's district and she was happy to not only eagerly make the motion for the rate increase every time, but to vote for it as well, pre and post-election.

Commissioner Fielder, you however, were in a tight race and voted against the increase before the election, but now that the election is behind you, an eager vote to increase our rates seems to come naturally for you. Why the change from October to January? Did MDU supply you with any new insights and compelling information that was different from what was presented in October? Not that I can tell. So, pray tell, what compelled you to change your vote? Come clean Commissioner Fielder. The public would ask, "where is the grade of accountability to the constituents"?

Commissioners Wellborn and Molnar-when you were running for office, did you pitch during your campaign that you were part of the Rate-Hikes-R-Us Candidates? I doubt you would have said that during your campaign, because if you had, you wouldn't have been elected. But here we are post the election and you both are snug in your seats and a rate hike is easy to approve now.

Commissioner Bukacek, with little hesitation you stand by your motion to raise our district's rates. MDU does not service your district. Please come visit, you will experience our colder winters and Pinocci's constituents bundled up outside and inside these winter months. To be fair I would have to search way back to see if you have ever voted against a price hike for any district.

MDU should have to justify the full increase, especially since the interim increase makes up 85% of the requested increase without a comprehensive look at the facts. Not only are you allowing Monopoly-R-Us MDU to pilfer our pockets, you are lining the pockets of mulit-million and billion dollar executives and investors at the expense of your struggling Montana members-many of which are on fixed incomes and underwater, that's getting deeper, due to Biden/Gianforte-flation (remember Ginaforte added over $3 billion to Bulloch's $9 billion dollar State of Montana budget and this year he wants to bump it up from $12.6 to over $18 Billion). And I thought Republicans were for less government spending? Maybe Republicans are but some that claim to be Republican aren't Republican and just use it to get elected. The Republican Party has a Platform of what they believe in for a reason. To hold those that run as Republicans accountable to the people.

Let's also look at the facts. MDU is a monopoly. As a protected monopoly, with captive ratepayers, they have a little risk. Residents cannot pick up the phone and select another supplier. When you have a monopoly you are protected from competition so your costs are lower; with that consumers should be protected from gouging by our *elected* PSC Commissioners.

Keeping in mind rates already increased due to greater use in the winter to heat homes and water heaters. Bottom line, less risk and greater rate of return. MDU wants a guaranteed return on equity even though they are a monopoly. Before her new position, Commissioner Fielder stated she would examine the evidence before she voted on the increase. What was the evidence? Aren't the upgrades and taxes already passed on to the consumer? Is there a ten-year comparison? What is their debt to asset ratio? What is their percentage of increase of stock payout? What is the percentage increase for any number of expenses. Why should they not pay for their own upgrades? Get a loan. We already know the big-player investors are making record profits. How many other companies does MDU own?

Could this information be shown on a screen during the hearing for constituents to view?

Is there any reason why constituents couldn't be afforded time after the presentation to ask questions?

Utility companies can sometimes use subsidiaries or affiliated companies they own to seemingly shift costs around, making their core operations appear more expensive than they actually are, which can then be used as justification to request rate increases from regulators, even if the overall financial health of the company remains strong. For Commissioners who voted for the rate increase (Fielder, Bukacek, Molnar and Wellborn), it is your job to scrutinize utilities, like MDU, to see if they are practicing this in order to potentially mislead the PSC and its members.

In the business world, companies can have other companies they own that they use to "launder" their profits through to offset and reduce the amount of taxes they owe and to make one company a lot more attractive to investors because it can offer higher yielding dividends. How many other companies does MDU own and in the traditional con man's shell game, under which shell is the real money under? We already know the big-player investors are making record profits.

Taxpayers PAY YOU a large 6 figure salary as our PSC Commissioners to do this investigating on our behalf.

Because the utility business has a direct impact on every resident and is mainly an excruciatingly boring subject buried in a thicket of obscure institutions and processes, opaque jargon, and acronyms out the wazoo; states have Public Service Commissions and Commissioners that are supposed to do the digging and understand how to protect US while ensuring the utility can stay in business with a 'reasonable' profit.

Just a thought, but a safe investment in banking is a cd and returns on that are yielding 2-3%. MDU shouldn't be asking for more than that and perhaps they shouldn't be asking for anything at all or lowering their rates due to their record profits which was pointed out by Commissioner Pinocci, but ignored by all the other commissioners.

Getting back to the complexities of the utility business, as Grist so eloquently stated, whether PURPA allows IOUs to customize RFPs for low-carbon QFs is actually quite important, the average resident, doesn't know it, because they fell asleep halfway through this sentence. Utilities are shielded by a force field of tedium.

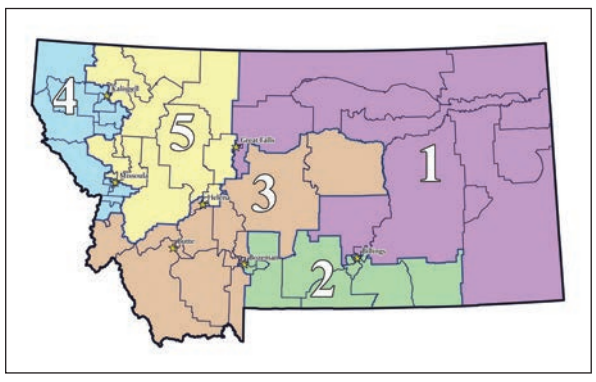
So, Commissioner Fielder, since you changed your vote from October to January, here is your homework assignment: prepare a research report for us that explains how MDU is structured (what companies they own) and show us the intercompany transfers of funds from each of those companies, and when they occurred, and explain why with lower costs of supply (lower natural gas costs), our gas bills need to be increased to pay for maintenance?

Constituents will be tuning in to your next hearing in person and zoom, on January 28th 2025.

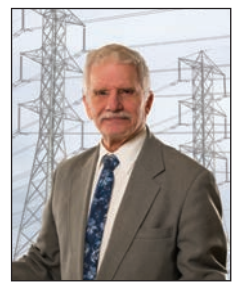
Please remember "We the People are the Board of Directors".

Incensed in Prairie County
Renee Pirtz
MDU Ratepayer-Prairie County

PSC Districts



MT PSC Commissioners


BRAD MOLNAR, PRESIDENT


JENNIFER FIELDER, VICE PRESIDENT


JEFF WELBORN, COMMISSIONER


ANNIE BUKACEK, COMMISSIONER


RANDY PINOCCI, COMMISSIONER

HOUSING HUSTLE

How Institutional Investors are Wrecking Havoc on the American Dream of Homeownership

Across the United States, communities are facing an acute housing affordability crisis. Rents and homelessness are rising while home ownership feels increasingly out of reach for millions.

What's driving that crisis? Increased corporate control over our housing market — by billionaire investors and their for-profit entities. Their ability to purchase large swaths of homes with cash, is driving these trends and placing significant barriers to the preservation and creation of permanently affordable housing.

According to the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana study in Indiana, investors pay cash for more than 80% of the homes they buy, outcompeting most other buyers who can offer only a traditional mortgage loan to finance the deal. Corporate investors now lease more than 40,000 single-family rental properties in Marion, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks and Johnson Counties, a Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana study published this month found. Out-of-state investors, drawn to the Indianapolis area by relatively cheap real estate compared with other cities, own roughly one in four rental homes in those five counties.

You're personally experiencing this crisis if you're among the over 653,000 U.S. residents who are unhoused — or the many more who are doubled-up in crowded housing, unable to leave a bad living situation, or who cannot afford to live independently.

You're experiencing it if you're among the 22.4 million households — half of all renters — who spend more than 30 percent or more of your income on rental housing. You're experiencing it if your wages aren't keeping up with your rent, if your neighborhood is flooded with Airbnbs, or you can't compete with investor home buyers to get a place of your own.

You're experiencing it if you have an absentee corporate landlord, a government-subsidized "affordable" apartment that's increasingly unaffordable, or a long commute because you can't afford decent affordable housing near your work or school. Even if you own a home in a mobile park, you may be worried an investor could buy the park and hike your pad fees or require you to move.

You may blame your housing challenge on your personal failure or a bad local market. But all of us are caught up in a larger housing system that is out of kilter and distorted by the participation of a class of institutional investors.

The reality is that the owners of concentrated wealth – billionaires and institutional investors – are playing a more pronounced role in residential housing, thereby creating price inflation, distortions, and inefficiencies in the market.

That is where a proposed Federal Trade Commission study comes in which seeks to

uncover the scale and scope of mega investor single-family rental holdings and their affect on home prices and rents across the single-family rental market.

Mega single-family rental investors are entities that own more than 1,000 single-family rental homes and there are more than 30 mega investors. The FTC is studying the situation and looking into the corporate structure, current and historical housing inventory information, rental and fee income, as well as strategic business plans and other investor information regarding growth plans, competition, prices, and expenses of these mega investors.

"As Americans face a housing shortage and pay soaring rents, it's vital to understand the role played by large institutional investors," said FTC Chair Lina M. Khan. "This proposed study would shed much-needed light on the mega-investors that have amassed huge portfolios of single-family rental units and potentially contributed to the housing challenges that Americans face."

"The rise in mega corporate landlords has deeply troubling implications for renters," said Director of the Office of Policy Planning Hannah Garden-Monheit. "The FTC is committed to uncovering the scope of these large corporations' holdings and their effects on housing costs."

If the potential 6(b) orders are issued, the FTC plans to publish a comprehensive property list that will match individual single-family rental properties to their affiliated owner entities based on information received. In addition, the information obtained would help the FTC understand how the rise of mega investors into single-family rental homes has affected house prices and rental rates, as well as the effects of ongoing consolidation in the industry.

An Area of Growing Concern

Following the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the single-family rental home market structure changed with the rise of large-scale investors that own large regional single-family rental inventories. Researchers estimate that mega single-family rental investors collectively own and operate 446,000 homes nationwide.

Among these investors is Blackstone Inc., which owns 63,000 single-family homes through its holdings Home Partners of America and Tricon Residential, according to a joint study last year

(continued on page 16A)

Key Findings

Predatory billionaire investors have bought up an unprecedented share of single-family homes, apartment buildings, and mobile home parks to extract more rents from already economically squeezed residents.

- For instance, **Blackstone is the largest corporate landlord in the world, with over 300,000 residential units across the United States**. Blackstone owns 149,000 multi-family apartment units, 63,000 single-family homes, 70 mobile home parks with 13,000 lots, and 144,300 beds of student housing in 205 properties. Blackstone also recently acquired 95,000 units of subsidized housing.

Billionaire investors are entering the short-term rental industry, removing a substantial portion of rental housing from the market.

- For instance, in one Dallas council district, returning entire home short-term rentals to the housing market would make 62 percent more rental units available.

Corporate landlords and billionaires are profiting from low-income tenants and mobile home residents by increasing rents while neglecting maintenance and repairs.

- Through algorithms and exorbitant rent hikes, corporate landlords are inflating rents to artificially higher prices.
- **Rising rents are a primary driver of homelessness.**

(Feeling the Heat from page 7A)

the past two years, home insurance rates rose nearly 20% nationwide, and experts predict that trend will continue.

In 2024, Montana recorded 2,345 wildfires that burned 387,000 acres. This was about average for the number of fires and acres burned over the past 10 years. Some of the most intense fire activity occurred in southeast Montana in August and September of 2024. The state spent just over $38 million on fire suppression costs, which was about a third more than the 10-year average. 25% of the fires were confirmed to be natural or lightning caused, while the rest were either human caused or undetermined.

Montana was projected to see one of the highest homeowner's insurance rate increases in the country in 2024 but as of this writing those figures have not been calculated.

Of the 10 states where the cost of homeowners insurance is rising the fastest, natural disasters that many blame on 'climate change' are the driving force behind those rate hikes in seven of the ten states from; hurricanes threatening the Carolinas, rising sea levels are raising concerns in Maine, and in states like Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Montana, a growing risk posed by wildfires.

"Montanans are seeing an above-average effect because of climate change (that's) being reflected in the home insurance market," Chase Gardner, data insights manager for insurance comparison company Insurify, told NBC Montana.

Gardner said while the average cost of home insurance in the state sits just under $1,800, Montana is unique in how much that number varies statewide, with mountainous areas prone to wildfire and plains prone to hail. And both of those severe weather events are expected to become more common in the future.

(True Cost of Renewables page 9A)

grazing after the lease ends?
- Who benefits the most? Is it your family or the shareholders sipping champagne in some distant city?
- Will this hurt your community? Could your lease lead to lawsuits, higher taxes, or broken relationships in your town?

Leasing your land for renewables might feel like hitting the jackpot today, but what about tomorrow? Don't let someone else's short-term profit leave you with a long-term mess.

Final Thoughts: Progress or a Raw Deal?

Renewable energy projects might sound like a step forward, but for rural communities, they're often two steps back. When fertile farmland becomes an industrial energy zone, the cost is paid in lost legacies, higher taxes, and fractured relationships.

Think carefully, ask hard questions, and don't sign anything until you've turned over every stone. After all, it's not just your land at stake—it's your family's future.

JW Thompson is a stubbornly determined amateur who helped lead a grassroots movement to stop a utility-scale solar project in northwest Ohio—the first ever denied by the state's regulatory board. Armed with 30+ years in civil engineering and surveying, an insatiable curiosity, and a knack for irritating his wife, JW spent countless hours researching renewable energy to support his cause. His efforts have since inspired and supported similar opposition groups across Ohio. Although confident in everything he writes, he readily admits he is human and prone to error, strongly encouraging everyone to perform their own due diligence and validate anything in his writing.

You can email JW Thompson at: renewable.concerns+TLBP@gmail.com

The Problem with Power Subsidies

Wind and solar receive the lion's share while producing less power

WRITTEN BY
Paige Lambermont
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A new paper from the Energy Alliance highlights one of the biggest causes of rising unreliability on the electricity grid—subsidies. The report's author, Bill Peacock, highlights the myriad problems that federal electricity subsidies have created.

Subsidies for unreliable power sources, namely wind and solar, have created a situation in which it's often more profitable to build facilities that have few benefits for the grid rather than the dispatchable capacity that is direly needed. Another issue with these subsidies is that they give the federal government significant control over the makeup of regional power grids by allowing them to shift the economics of power production in favor of their preferred technologies.

The gap between government subsidies for wind and solar and those for reliable thermal power units like natural gas, nuclear, and coal is massive, and thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), it's growing.

According to the paper, from 2010 to 2019, federal subsidies for wind were more than $36.7 billion with more $34.3 billion for solar, while subsidies for natural gas and oil were $25 billion, with $12.8 billion going to coal, and $15.4 billion for nuclear. In the perfect world, no energy sources would receive government subsidies, federal or otherwise. The very existence of these subsidies creates false incentives in the market and causes facilities that would otherwise not be financially workable to be built in place of more reliable ones.

The imbalance between appropriations for wind and solar, and those for everything else are even more extreme when viewed per MWh of power produced. According to Peacock, "The success is predicated on the fact that renewable energy subsidies are not only larger than subsidies for thermal generation in absolute terms but even larger on a per unit of electricity generated."

Between 2010 and 2019, the per MWh subsidy for natural gas and oil was $.39, for coal it was $.73, and for nuclear $1.93. Meanwhile, wind received $18.86 for every MWh of power it produced, and solar received $82.46. This is an astronomical difference and very clearly demarcates the producers from the produce-nots.

Subsidies on this scale allow the federal government to have an outsized influence on the economics of power production. In the paper, Peacock emphasizes this influence, "These taxpayer-funded, government-guaranteed returns are the reason that renewable generation is swamping the U.S. electric grid and pushing investment in reliable thermal generation to the side. Investment in renewables grew from $29.4 billion in 2010 to $55.4 billion in 2019 as investors chased subsidized profits."

As though this subsidy situation weren't already bad enough, enter the IRA. The IRA inflates the subsidies for wind and solar by an incredible degree. According to the paper, before the IRA, federal wind and solar subsidies were expected to be $7.4 billion in 2023, after the IRA that figure nearly doubled to $14.6 billion. Over the period from 2023 to 2029 the IRA is expected to "inflate" wind and solar subsidies from $66 billion to more than $108 billion. This will inevitably further shift the economics of power generation.

This matters because grid reliability is already faltering during the coldest and warmest days in many regions. As demand increases in the coming years reliable capacity will be needed to meet demand. These subsidies are a threat to reliability and opposing them should be a priority for anyone who uses electrical power. This starts but certainly doesn't end with repealing the IRA subsidies that have made matters worse.

Paige Lambermont is a Columnist Fellow at Independent Institute's Catalyst, and Research Fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in the Center for Energy and Environment. She covers the electrical grid, energy regulation, nuclear power issues, and other free-market energy topics. Paige has a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science from American University and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Idaho. She is also a Columnist Fellow at Catalyst.

(National Security from page 6A)

difficulty, adding increasing costs that render the projects unfeasible. EarthGrid's plasma torches, however, boast the capability to bore through various materials seamlessly, by utilizing specialized "Rock Recipes" that allow them to break down the specific type of rock encountered more efficiently.

The cost-effectiveness of EarthGrid's technology is further exemplified by lower operating costs compared to traditional methods. There is no need for frequent changes of drill bits and cutter heads, resulting in reduced downtime. The absence of drilling mud and chemicals simplifies the waste disposal process and makes the construction less damaging to the surrounding environment.

Addressing Safety and Environmental Concerns

One notable concern surrounding plasma drilling is the extreme heat generated by the process. However, EarthGrid has implemented sophisticated measures to manage this heat effectively. Ground-penetrating radar is employed to meticulously map the underground infrastructure, ensuring that the plasma torches avoid existing utilities and structures.

The heat generated during plasma drilling dissipates through a phase change when the rock melts, resulting in tunnel walls that typically have temperatures below 100 degrees Celsius soon after the torch passes through. This is crucial, as it ensures that the heat is not intense enough to melt pipes or significantly impact the surrounding environment. Furthermore, the utilization of a vacuum removal system and air jets helps dissipate the heat efficiently, minimizing its impact on the surrounding areas.

Versatility Across Geologies

EarthGrid's plasma drilling technology has undergone extensive testing across a variety of geological conditions, showcasing its adaptability and efficiency. Notably, the technology has demonstrated exceptional speed, surpassing traditional boring techniques, especially when dealing with harder geologies.

In instances where the drilling encounters soil, such as glacial fill-ins, EarthGrid's technology proves its versatility. The rapid vaporization of organics leaves a crust that can be managed through additional construction techniques, such as 'shotcreting' the tunnel walls. The technology has been successfully tested in wet soil, mixed surfaces, and soil with natural gas injections.

Innovative Business Models

EarthGrid introduces two innovative business models—BOOM (Build, Own, Operate & Maintain) and BADASS (Boring And Drilling As a Simple Service)—providing clients with flexibility in project engagement. The BOOM model allows EarthGrid to build and own the tunnel (covering permitting and financing), and lease space to companies who wish to install their infrastructure within it. In contrast, the BADASS model simply allows EarthGrid to build the tunnel for clients paying per cubic meter, and clients maintain ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

This level of flexibility in business models adds a layer of customization to suit the unique needs of different projects. The models not only facilitate the construction of tunnels but also offer options for long-term partnerships and revenue-sharing arrangements.

Regulatory Approvals and Expansion Plans

EarthGrid's strategic approach includes obtaining telecommunications utility status and a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) in 37 states, with plans for further expansion. This strategic positioning enhances the likelihood of obtaining Right of Way (ROW) permits, a critical component for projects involving underground conduits and utility lines. CPCNs can empower EarthGrid in negotiations with state departments of transportation, for favorable considerations in ROW access.

Depth Challenges and Cityscapes

The unique challenges presented by cityscapes, including the depth of storm sewers and the unpredictability of municipal infrastructure, necessitate nimble solutions. Municipalities often lack accurate records of storm sewer locations, making it challenging to plan around these obstacles. EarthGrid addresses this challenge through the use of ArcGIS solutions for co-location to map the underground landscape. EarthGrid's plasma drilling technology proves to be more nimble in terms of turning radius, with a range of 6 to 8 meters, allowing it to maneuver through tight spaces in urban environments.

Personnel Safety and Environmental Monitoring

Safety is a paramount concern during tunnel-boring operations. EarthGrid implements strict safety measures, prohibiting any personnel from entering the tunnel while the tunnel-boring robot is in operation. Access can be provided through vertical shafts, ensuring a safe entry point for maintenance and emergency situations.

The use of electric carts for maintenance purposes minimizes the need for human presence within the tunnel during operations. Additionally, noxious gasses generated during the plasma drilling process are continuously monitored to safeguard personnel health and well-being.

Waste Management and Environmental Impact

One significant advantage of plasma drilling over traditional methods is its eco-friendly approach to waste management. Unlike horizontal directional drilling (HDD), which utilizes lubricants and generates wastewater, plasma drilling produces spoils consisting solely of rock. This eliminates the need for expensive wastewater transport and presents an opportunity to reuse the rock spoils. The repurposing of spoils into sand for shotcrete and concrete mixtures contributes to the construction industry, providing a sustainable solution for road and infrastructure development. The absence of harmful drilling chemicals further minimizes the environmental impact, aligning with EarthGrid's commitment to responsible and sustainable construction practices.

(Imported Coal Ash from page 3A)

The US generates hundreds of millions of tons of coal ash each year.

One environmentalist raised the irony of the U.S. borrowing money from China, paying interest to China for that money, wasting energy to ship coal ash from other countries like China to the U.S., and then sending that money back to China to pay for their coal ash, when we have millions of tons of this sitting along our riverbanks.

Like other states, Montana is struggling with how to dispose of its existing coal ash waste which at Colstrip will cost between $163 million to $300 million to move from an unlined area to a lined pond where ethe product is still being put to beneficial use. What is being overlooked is the fact that coal ash has real value, and technology to reprocess it is already being used.

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"We can ... take the material that would be an environmental liability and transform it into something that has a beneficial use," said Jimmy Knowles of The SEFA Group, which partners with utilities in South Carolina and Maryland to recycle both old and new ash.

In fact, Montana, like Virginia, should mandate the use of coal ash or it's lighter by-product fly ash, as an additive, in all transportation department construction projects that use concrete. Montana could require that all coal ash have rare earth elements mined out of it and then have it be recycled into concrete and other construction products. Concrete-makers, love cola ash because it can make their product cheaper and more durable by replacing some cement with fly ash.

"We'd like to use fly ash in every yard we produce," said Eric Misenheimer, at Chandler Concrete Co., which operates dozens of North Carolina and Virginia plants. Coal ash can double the psi of concrete making it that much more durable.

Clearly, recycling coal ash is safer and better for the economy than burying it and hoping it doesn't turn into an unfunded liability years down the road.

In 2014, a pipe ruptured at a Duke Energy plant in North Carolina, polluting the Dan River with miles of sludge. A federal investigation found Duke allowed coal ash dumps at five power plants to leak toxic waste into water supplies. Duke pleaded guilty, agreeing to pay fines and restitution. North Carolina now requires recycling as ash ponds close.

At least one utility, WE Energies in Wisconsin, recycles 100 percent of its freshly burned waste. Its fly ash was used to build the Milwaukee Art Museum, bottom ash is used for structural fills and road bases, and gypsum is sold as soil additive.

"We were very good at building landfills and filling them up," said Bruce Rammey, of parent company WEC Energy Group. He became convinced in the 1980s that recycling's cheaper in the long run.

WE Energies hasn't completely eliminated its legacy coal ash as it still has legacy coal ash buried in WI. In fact, in 2011, a bluff collapsed near a power plant outside Milwaukee, sending soil, coal ash and other debris into Lake Michigan. This example should propel our Montana legislators to eliminate the cost and potential environmental hazards of storing these materials, and simply require they be put to beneficial use in the construction industry- just like the State of Wisconsin does.

(Housing Hustle from page 14A)

According to the latest figures available from Realtor.com®, 71% of home purchases in Albuquerque, NM were all-cash in October 2024.

by the Institute for Policy Studies and Popular Democracy.

"In recent years Americans have increasingly faced a shortage of affordable housing and found themselves paying soaring rents," Khan said. "Enforcers and policymakers on both sides of the aisle have raised alarm bells about large institutional investors buying up available rental properties and potentially increasing rents in local housing markets."

As these giant investors gobble up large swaths of houses in certain markets, they allegedly gain the market concentration that allows them to jack up rents. In addition, it appears in some markets these investors have taken so many houses off the market that it has raised prices for home buyers, as well, the commission said.

The FTC's request for public comment on a proposed 6(b) study into mega investors follows growing concern from local, state, and federal policy makers regarding the growth of mega single-family rental investors in local markets.

Members of the public submitted numerous comments specifically identifying large single-family rental investors as responsible for buying up inventories of houses in local markets

across the United States. In an FTC listening session in June 2024 for renters in Atlanta, participants expressed concerns about the effects of mega single-family rental investor expansion. Members of Congress also have sent the FTC letters urging that the Commission use its existing authority to require reporting of residential real estate transactions under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act.

The public will have 60 days to submit comments at Regulations.gov. Once submitted, comments will be posted to Regulations.gov.

Top 5 Equity Firms in the U.S. in 2024

Name of equity firm, headquarters location, key people/net worth

1. **Blackstone Inc., New York 45.3 billion**
2. **Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR), New York**
   George Roberts, $16.1 billion
   Henry Kravis $14.5 billion
3. **TPG, Fort Worth, Texas**
   David Bonderman $6.9 billion
   Jim Coulter $5.2 billion
4. **The Carlyle Group, Washington DC**
   William Conway, Jr., $4 billion
   Daniel D'Aniello, $4.5 billion
   David Rubenstein $3.8 billion
5. **Thoma Bravo, Chicago**
   Carl Thoma, $4.3 billion
   Orlando Bravo, $9.8 billion

The Facts About the Montana Recall Act

WRITTEN BY
Mark and Brooke Winters
Great Falls, Montana

The Beginning

In 1976, Montana voters said they had enough of Montana elected and appointed officials not being accountable to the voters. The voters decided, by a margin of 57.4% YES to 42.6% NO, to pass Initiative 73 – THE MONTANA RECALL AND ADVISORY RECALL ACT.

In the Attorney General's Explanatory Statement for Initiative 73, it stated "A officer could be recalled for any reason, regardless of a good faith attempt to perform his duties"

Those advocating for, and passing, initiative 73 had some of the same concerns and frustrations with government that we still experience today. In the argument advocating for approval of Initiative 73, the supporters stated "The Montana Recall Act is designed to give back to the people the power of recall which was taken away by the enactment of the 1972 Montana Constitution. Because over 80% of our government is presently in the hands of appointed officials, this act also provides for recall of appointed officials". They also stated that "The Recall law is an effort to put control of government back into the hands of the people by giving the citizens of Montana the authority to recall any government official from office if hefails to uphold the Constitution of the United States or ignores his fiduciary responsibility to the electorate". Finally, the supporters of Initiative 73, commenting on the petition process, stated that "many Montanans are convinced that such a law is necessary and badly needed to protect our state from the growth and ravages of unresponsive government".

All of these statements advocating for passage of Initiative 73, still apply today – almost 50 years later!

Those opposed to the Recall Act provided the Chicken Little defense. If you believed their rambling arguments, government would almost certainly cease to function. The voters didn't buy it and passed Initiative 73 by a significant margin.

Initiative 73 passes and Montana government is again accountable to the people. Great. So what is the problem?

The Problem

Initiative 73 – THE MONTANA RECALL AND ADVISORY RECALL ACT as passed by the voters would have put oversight and control of the government back in the hands of the people if it had been implemented as written and approved in 1976. The problem began when the Legislature, in 1977 and 1979, modified Initiative 73 before it was made into Law (MCA 2-16-6).

What changes did they make? The Legislature, made up of people who themselves, their friends, families and cronies, would be most affected by Initiative 73, effectively gutted the law. The most significant and damaging change made required that an elected or appointed official could only be recalled '**for cause'**. Remember, Initiative 73 as passed by the voters, provided that "A officer could be recalled for any reason".

So what does '**for cause'** mean? After the Legislature finished their work, the Montana Recall Act stated that an official could only be recalled for: "Physical or mental lack of fitness, incompetence, violation of oath of office, official misconduct, or conviction of a felony offense enumerated in Title 45 are the only grounds for a recall. A person may not be recalled for performing a mandatory duty of the office that the person holds or for not performing any act that, if performed, would subject the person to prosecution for official misconduct." MCA 2-16-603(3).

This '**for cause'** requirement made the Montana Recall Act, as passed into law, the exact opposite of what the voters in 1976 approved by a wide margin, thus making it nearly impossible to successfully recall an elected or appointed official in Montana.

Where Are We Today?

The Montana Recall Act has changed little since 1979.

Here are the basics of the Recall Act as written into law.

If you want to recall an elected or appointed official, it needs to be '**for cause',** as stated above.

You must circulate a properly formatted petition for signatures and collect verified signatures of between 10% to 20% of qualified voters. Nominally 10% for state officials, 15% for City or County officials and 20% for school board officials.

From the date when the petition format is approved, the petitioners only have 90 days to collect the signatures.

If you get the required number of verified signatures, a recall election will be held and the voters will determine whether the official subjected to the recall petition should be recalled. A yes or no is by simple majority. There is a general misconception of the recall act that if the petition collects the required number of verified signatures, the official is removed from office. That is incorrect! A recall election will be held and the official's fate is decided by a vote of the people.

If during the recall election, the voters decide not to recall the official, the official stays in office and cannot be subject to another recall effort for a minimum of 2 years.

If during the recall election, the voters decide to recall the official, the official will leave office and an election is held to replace the official, pursuant to MCA 7-4-2106 – Vacancy on Board of County Mission; and/or MCA 5-2-402 – Appointment By Board of County Commissioners.

The successful candidate from this election will then be sworn into office.

There are many rules and requirements in each step of the process, but this is the gist of it.

The process is relatively simple, straightforward and completely stacked against the voters because of the '**for cause'** requirement!

It is also important to point out that the government entity, of which the official belongs, can fight the recall petition at any step in the process – and usually do. The official will usually have access to government lawyers

(continued on page 4B)

What Gives You The Right?

WRITTEN BY
Rae Grulkowski, Stockett, Montana
Cascade County Commissioner 2022 - 2024

Montana's open meeting and public participation laws are derived from two fundamental rights contained within the Montana Constitution.

1. **The Right To Know** is your constitutional right in Article 2, Section 9 of our *Montana State Constitution*. It states, *"No person shall be deprived of their right to examine documents or to observe the deliberations of all public bodies or agencies of state government and its subdivisions, except in cases which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceed s the merits of public disclosure."*

   Additionally, statutory provisions (State laws) were adopted, regarding the public's Right to Know, and are found in Title 2, Chapter 3, Part 2 of Montana Code Annotated (MCA), Titled, Open Meetings. Also known as "Open Meetings Laws".

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1. **The Right to Participate** is your constitutional right in Article 2, Section 8 of our *Montana State Constitution*. It states, "*The public has the right to expect governmental agencies to afford such reasonable opportunity for citizen participation in the operation of the agencies prior to the final decision as may be provided by law."*

   Additionally, statutory provisions (State laws) were adopted, regarding the public's Right to Participate, and are found in Title 2, Chapter 3, Part 1 of Montana Code Annotated (MCA), Titled, Notice and Opportunity to Be Heard.

MCA 2-3-103(2) states, "*The governor shall ensure that each board, bureau, commission, department, authority, agency, or officer of the executive branch of the state adopts coordinated rules for its programs. The guidelines must provide policies and procedures to facilitate public participation in those programs, consistent with subsection (1). These guidelines must be adopted as rules and published in a manner so that the rules may be provided to a member of the public upon request."* Essentially, governmental entities as listed above, must adopt bylaws and provide them to the public

(continued on page 6B)

Out of Line Nine

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WRITTEN BY
Brett Mills, Cascade, MT

This is how things are going on the so-called "conservative" side of politics in the United States in general, and strongly so in Montana. *Cascade County is not an exception.*

The following quote is an opinion piece published prior to the 2024 Montana Primary Election, entitled "They're RINOs", written by Jeff H. Larsen, of Kalispell, MT, published in the *Hungry Horse News* (May 22, 2024):

> "Don't be fooled by the PAC of liberals calling themselves Conservatives4MT sending out post cards attacking our well known conservative Republicans. This PAC is nothing more than a liberal pack of RINOs. A little research on this PAC shows they raised around $180,000. Dark money PACs including Guarantee PAC out of Washington D.C. and the MHA PAC State Fund out of Helena, donated the majority of the money to this PAC. MHA stands for Montana Hospital Association. The PAC also received $25,000 from well known Flathead County RINO Bruce Tutvedt.
>
> Instead of attacking actual conservatives, this liberal PAC of RINOs should join all of us to get rid of Tester and Biden and the radical Tester/Biden agenda that is destroying our country right before our eyes. The Tester/Biden disastrous border invasion, inflation, out of control spending, war on energy and attacks on women's sports is destroying our country.
>
> Please reject liberal Conservatives4MT PAC pack of RINOs. Vote for true conservatives in the primary, which include Regier, SD5; Kelly, HD9; Mitchell, HD5, Byrne HD11. Also please join me and thousands and thousands of Montanans in rejecting Tester and Biden and their radical liberal agenda. —Jeff H. Larsen, Kalispell"

Jeff H. Larsen has described the problem with Republican politics in Montana. The phenomenon is not limited to the Conservatives4MT PAC(political action committee), Kalispell and Flathead County. This describes liberal *Republican* PACs across the nation and it is happening in many counties in Montana. That is not to say that all Republican PACs are liberal, but it is to say, *do some research on those PACs who are sending you mailers on behalf of their favorite candidates.* This is exactly how the liberal Political Action Committees (PACs) are funding campaigns for liberal-minded Republicans, i.e. "Republicans In Name Only" (RINOs).

The fact is, the very word "conservative" is a yet another victim of left-wing word hijacking and so is the word "moderate". The liberals, and outright leftists, have caught on to using terms like these because they know Republicans have traditionally been recognized as the "conservative party", and they simply use these terms to get votes. It's been duly noted that everyone, Republican or Democrat, suddenly becomes conservative in an election year. Then once the election is over, they go back to their left-wing politics to the disheartening of their constituents.

Unfortunately for traditional conservatives or constitutional conservatives, there is no longer any consistency in the Republican Party regarding conservatism. The so-called moderate Republicans are at the very least as liberal as Democrats were just a decade ago. They're not even as conservative as former President John F. Kennedy was, who was considered to be quite liberal in his day. That alone reflects just how far left the United States of America has slid over the course of the past 60 years.

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Gayle Lammers
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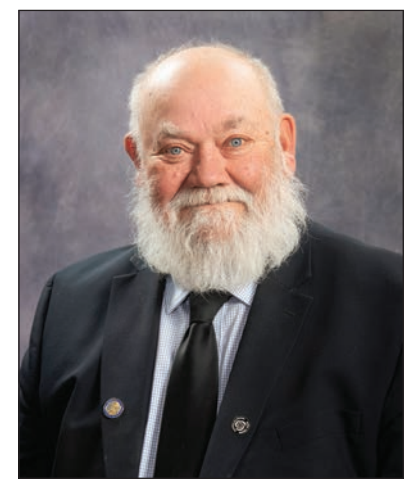

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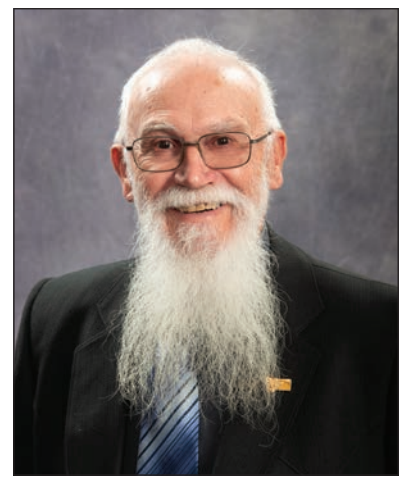

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The problem is these "Republicans" are identifying as Democrats this session.

It is indeed fortunate that Republicans were able to come together to overcome the leftist Biden and Tester political machines, but don't rest on the idea that Republicans are in control if you're conservative minded. Hold those people accountable who ran as conservative Republicans. Be the watchdog public. Stealing a quote from the Department of Homeland Security: "If you see something, say something!" The cavalry is not coming to save you from the leftists. That's your job. Study the Constitution of the United States — it's actually a pretty short document. But learn what it means, not just what someone tells you it means. *Due diligence* has become a cliché, but only because Americans have become so desperately dependent on their government.

The latest example of RINOs getting elected in Montana was recently published in the Montana Sentinel (January 7, 2025) the headline reading ***Nine "Republican" Senators Cross The Aisle And Commit A RINOsurrection To Give Democrats De Facto Control Of The Montana Senate***. The article goes on to state,

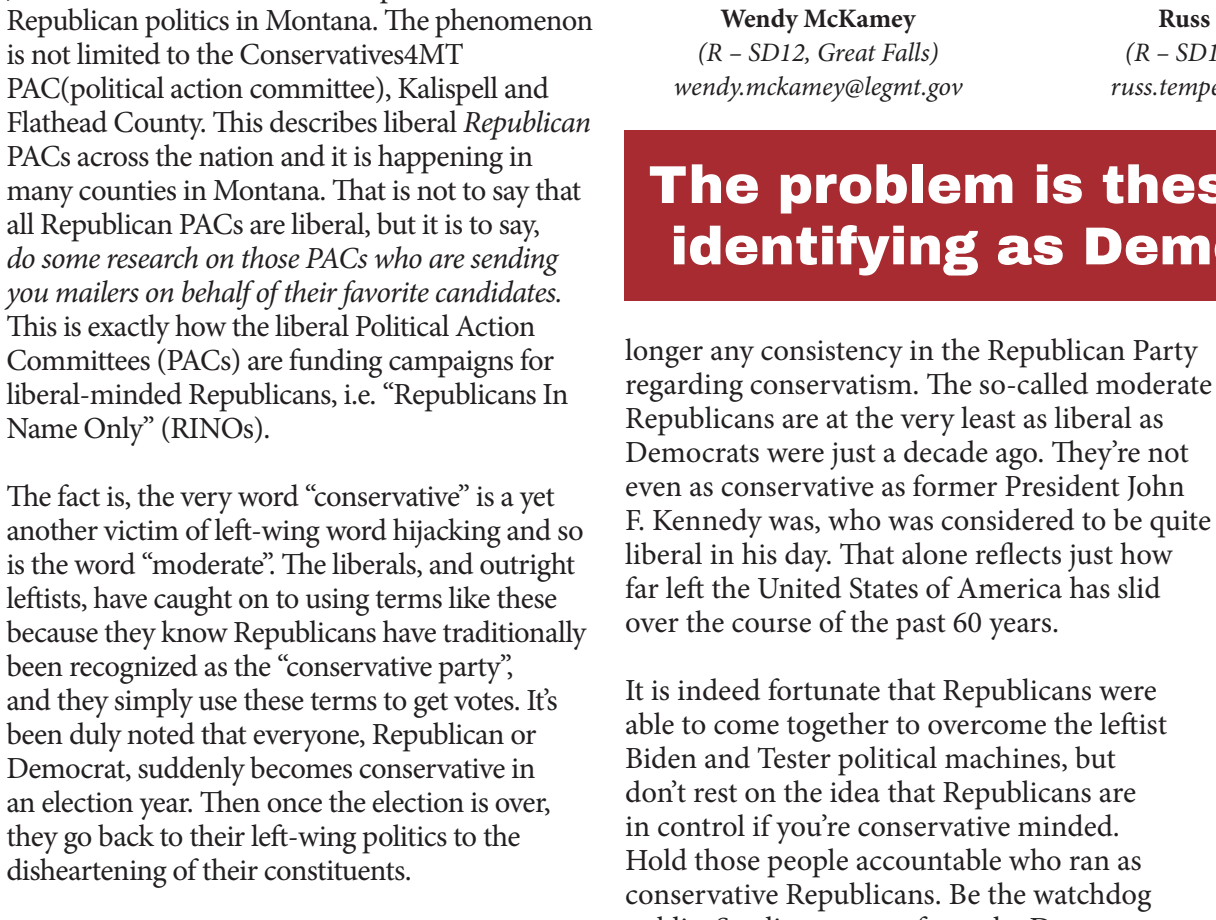
> "Republicans hold a 32-18 majority in the Montana Senate. Still, recently, nine Republicans betrayed their principles and their voters by siding with Democrats during a critical Senate rules vote on day one of the 2025 legislative session. Day two just concluded, and all that's been accomplished is the swearing-in ceremony followed by betrayal. The Senate and House have not held hearings, and the people's work is not getting done because of the nine Senators."

Noteworthy for Cascade County is recently elected Senator, former Montana House Member, Josh Kassmier, and veteran Senator, Wendy McKamey, who is making a career of the Montana Legislature; she is generally liberal leaning – as reflected by her voting record.

Don't forget Montana's State House of Representatives! There are plenty of RINOs there, too.

Montana is rated as a ***purple*** state by the American Conservative Union, the host of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). Don't be fooled. The reason Montana

(continued on page 10B)



Now is The Time to Get Involved!

WRITTEN BY
Ginny Rogliano, Great Falls, Montana

A new year is beginning and it's a great time to get involved and learn how your local government works for you. Learn how your tax dollars are being allocated and the thinking behind these allocations.

My initial experience with our local government was a Cascade County Special Commission Meeting held on Friday March 31, 2023. A friend of mine had mentioned this meeting to me and thought I might be interested. We usually got together every month and somehow the topic of politics always came up. I was becoming intrigued with the politics in Cascade County. Therefore, I decided to attend this meeting. The meeting was held at Expo Park and there was a large crowd of people in attendance. The meeting topic was 'Election Process', a presentation by newly elected Clerk & Recorder Sandra Merchant. I have to say I was truly disturbed by some of the Public Comments made and the unprofessional behavior exhibited by some of the attendees. After careful consideration I felt compelled to Email a letter to the 3 Cascade County Commissioners to share my concerns with the disrespect I witnessed. This experience motivated me to get involved and educate myself. I encourage my family, friends and neighbors to also get involved. I realize everyone has a busy schedule so whatever amount of time you can dedicate to observing how your local government operates will be beneficial and eye opening. I expect to see professionalism, civility and transparency at meetings. If that is not what I am experiencing I know I have the option to use my polite voice and document with an Email to share my concerns and dissatisfaction. Remaining silent will not achieve an acceptable outcome.

To get involved, there are several opportunities to attend a variety of meetings and participate and educate yourself on the decisions being made here in Cascade County.

A few of these opportunities are listed below.

1. **Our State Legislators** meet in Helena in odd years. Educate yourself on who your legislators are in the House and the Senate. The 2025 Montana 69th Legislature Session has started and it will be interesting to hear about the issues and what bills will be introduced and passed. Residents of Cascade County should contact their legislators either by telephone or Email and share their thoughts and input. Communicating with our state legislators provides them the knowledge of how we would like to be represented. You can find your legislator and the session calendar at www.leg.mt.gov. General questions can be addressed by calling 406-444-3064.


photo by Ginny Rogliano

2. **The Cascade County Commission** has three elected Commissioners. The current Cascade County Commissioners are Commissioner Jim Larson, Joe Briggs and Eric Hinebauch. This Commission meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 9:30am. A Work Session is always held the Wednesday prior at 2 pm. Individuals can attend in person at 325 2nd Avenue North, Room111 in Great Falls or access the meetings via Zoom. You can access the Cascade County website at cascadecountymt.gov. The agendas and minutes are available if you scroll to the bottom of the page and click on **Agendas & Minutes.** That information will provide the topics that will be discussed at the meeting. There is always an opportunity for **Public Comment** at the end of each meeting.

3. **The Great Falls City Commission** includes elected Mayor Cory Reeves and Commissioners Joe McKenney, Rick Tryon, Shannon Wilson and Susan Wolff. The City Commission meets the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm. A Work Session at 5:30pm is held before the scheduled meeting. These meetings are held at the Commission Chambers, 2 Park Drive South, Gibson Room in Great Falls. These meetings can also be watched via Live Streaming Spectrum TV Channel 190. Recordings of any previous meetings are posted on the meetings page. There is an opportunity for **Public Comment** at the meeting or it can also be provided in writing by mail to: City Clerk, PO Box 5021, Great Falls, MT 59403 or by Email to: commission@greatfallsmt.net. You can access the Great Falls City website at greatfallsmt.net.

4. **Great Falls Public Schools Board Meetings** meets the 2nd and 4th Monday at 5:30pm in the Aspen Room at the District Offices Building located at 1100 4th Street North in Great Falls. Educating our children is of utmost importance. The agendas are available on the website which can be accessed at gfps.k12.mt.us or info@gfps.k12.mt.us.

5. **Great Falls Public Library** Board of Trustees meets the 4th Tuesday of each month at 4:30pm at the Library. The Library is located at 301 2nd Avenue North in Great Falls. Information can be found by accessing the website at greatfallslibrary.org.

In closing, becoming involved with your local government provides an opportunity to educate yourself and use your voice. Situations will not change or improve without the public's input. Everyone is invited to come and participate. It's very rewarding. Now is a great time to get involved. Let's all work together Cascade County. I'll look forward to seeing you at a meeting very soon!

Cascade County Reference Information

Cascade County Commission: commission@cascadecountymt.gov
325 2nd Avenue North
Great Falls, Montana 59401
Regular meetings on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month 9:30am

Great Falls City Commission: commission@greatfallsmt.net
2 Park Drive South
Great Falls, Montana 59401
Regular meetings on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month 7:00pm

Town of Belt: bch@3rivers.net or 406-277-3621
Belt Town Hall
70 Caster Street
Belt, Montana 59412
Town Council meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month 7:00pm

Town of Neihart: hjenloe@3rivers.net or 406-236-5505
Community/Senior Center
200 Main Street
Neihart, Montana 59465
Town Council meets the 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday of the month 7:00pm

Town of Cascade: 406-468-2808
Wedsworth Hall
9 Front Street North
Cascade, Montana 59421
Town Council meets the 2nd Thursday of the month 6:00pm

Montana State House and Senate Legislators: www.leg.mt.gov or leave a message for a Legislator at 406-444-4800

What Happens When An Elected Official Vacates Their Office?

WRITTEN BY
Rae Grulkowski, Stockett, MT

Did you ever wonder how officials are appointed to seats when there is a vacancy that occurs prior to their term ending by election? You might be surprised to know it is the authority of the County Commission to appoint the individual. And it is the role of the County Central Committee(s) to provide the list of candidates which the County Commissioners may choose from. This is the case with all your County elected officials' positions as well as with Legislative representatives.

Recent appointments in Cascade County were Don Ryan (D), County Commissioner, District 3, in February 2021 and Eric Tilleman (R), HD 23, in July 2024.

The statute to reference for filling vacancies in the County Commission is MCA 7-4-2106
The statute to reference for filling vacancies in the Legislature is MCA 5-2-402

Don Ryan (D) was appointed to the County Commissioner, District 3 seat when former Commissioner Jane Weber (D), resigned in January 2020, after serving 2 years of her 6 year term. By statute, the democrat central committee was responsible to submit a list of 3 candidates who reside in the vacated district (in this case, district 3), and who have lived in the vacated district for at least 2 years immediately preceding the day the vacancy occurred. It is worth mentioning that it is the responsibility for the Central Committees to provide those lists, by lawfully quorum meetings whereby action may be taken with full representation of the central committee.

County Commissioners were not able to select from the list of the first three candidates submitted so they requested a second list of three from the Democrat Central Committee. Pursuant to MCA 7-4-2106(a), *"Whenever the remaining commissioners are unable to elect an appointee from the submitted list, they shall request a second list of three names from the county central committee. The second list may not contain any of the names submitted on the first list. The remaining commissioners shall then select an appointee from the individuals named on both lists."*

Don Ryan was officially appointed in a Commissioners meeting on February 10, 2021. But that did not mean the appointment was for 6 years, as is the term of a County Commissioner. When appointed, the successful candidate serves only until the next General Election. In this case, the next General Election was November of 2022. Ryan chose to run as a candidate and lost the election to Rae Grulkowski. Grulkowski then fulfilled the remaining two years of Weber's 6 year term for district 3. In 2024, this seat was up for election again because the 6 year term ended, and Eric Hinebauch won as your new County Commissioner in district 3.

Eric Tilleman (R) was appointed to the Montana House District 23 Representative seat when former Representative Scot Kerns (R) resigned in June of 2024, 6 months prior to the end of this term. The republican central committee was then responsible to submit a list of 3 candidates, but it was not required they live in HD23. Statute is a bit different for legislative representatives in this manner, with legislative candidates *not* having to live in the district they run for. The County Commissioners were able to choose from the first list of 3 but a second list of 3 is granted by statute if it were needed.

Tilleman was officially appointed in a Commissioner meeting on July 22, 2024.

(continued on page 5B)

Watts Inside?

Across the country, a big backlash to new renewables is mounting based on the national security, financial, health, safety and environmental costs of wind and sun energy.

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Utility scale solar and wind takes up a lot of land, requiring anywhere from 5 to 10 acres per megawatt. And there can be big drainage and sediment pollution problems if developers are careless. Wind turbines are huge and visible for miles. They do kill thousands of birds and bats a year. They can catch fire or leak lubricating fluid that contain forever chemicals like PFAS (Poly Fluoro Alkyl Substances). Like other sources of power, they have their own set of problems.

If you thought politics was polarizing, wait till you cross the bridge of solar and wind turbine installations. In four terms as a county elected official in northern Ohio, it was the most contentious issue Doug Weisenauer had ever seen.

Robert Zulla a writer for the Ohio Capital journal wrote the following which epitomizes the situation across the country:

> Crawford County, Ohio, is far from an isolated case. Across the country — from suburban Virginia, rural Michigan, southern Tennessee and the sugar cane fields of Louisiana to the coasts of Maine and New Jersey and the deserts of Nevada — new renewable energy development has drawn heated opposition that has birthed, in many cases, bans, moratoriums and other restrictions.

With states, corporations, utilities and the federal government setting aggressive renewable energy goals, as well as big tax incentives such as in last year's Inflation Reduction Act, wind and solar developers have been pushing projects that are igniting fierce battles over property rights, loss of farmland, climate change, aesthetics, the merits of renewable power and a host of other concerns.

I said all along I am not telling people what they can and can't do on their property," Weisenauer said. "It got ugly. Our families have been split, friendships broken. It was bad for our community."

Though Zartman, the Republican former county commissioner from Ohio, acknowledged that some of the loudest pushback comes from conservatives, he said he sees a "mix" of motivation in opponents, including major resistance to changes to the skyline. (Some renewable projects even in famously liberal areas have sparked major opposition).

"I haven't seen anywhere on a deed that it tells you you have control over your

(continued on page 11B)

(Montana Recall Act from page 1B)

fighting on their side. Unless the petitioner has unlimited funds, and a lawyer who will take on the government, many recall petitions are killed because the petitioners cannot afford the legal costs to take on the government. Other attempts to recall an official have been met with threats of lawsuits by government lawyers against the petitioners if the recall effort is not dropped, when the petitioners are only exercising their constitutional rights. Ironically, this is the kind of government excess and overreach Initiative 73 was trying to address.

The Problem With the 'For Cause' Requirement

The primary problem with the '**for cause'** requirement is that the Recall Act, as passed by the legislature, has not clearly defined the criteria of each '**for cause'** item. In some cases, the courts have provided the definition through case law. In other cases, there is insufficient case law.

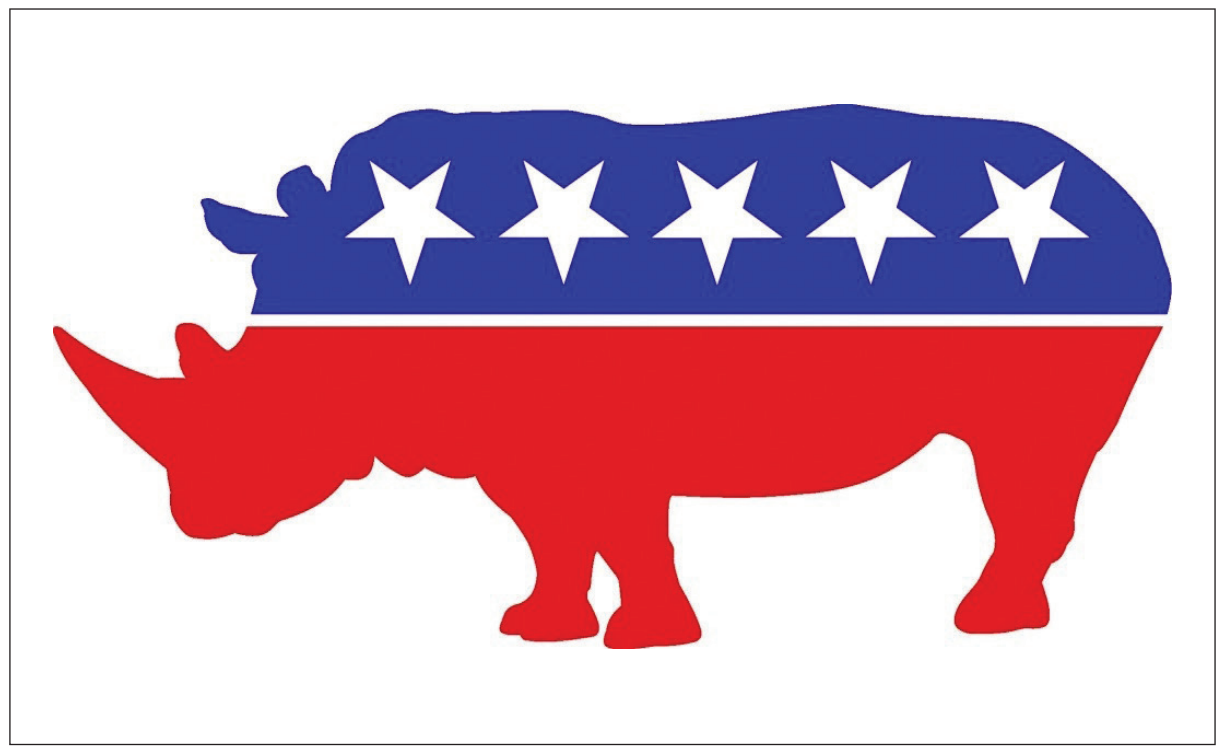
And here is the real racket – judges, county and state's attorneys, politicians and bureaucrats, all of whom could potentially be subject to recall, interpret the law to the benefit of those in power and to the detriment of the people. This is best epitomized by the ruling in Foster V. Kovich. To quote the Montana Supreme Court, "Some state constitutions or statutes provide very broad recall and vest in the electorate the power to determine whether acts alleged in the petition are grounds for recall. In Montana, however, the legislature has limited the grounds for recall and has given the District Court the power to determine the legal sufficiency of the allegations in the recall petition. The legal sufficiency of the allegations is not left to the electorate". (Foster V. Kovich). This had to be a devastating blow to the sponsors of Initiative 73 and the people who voted for it.

A good example is the definition of "official misconduct" regarding recall. The courts have established case law that to meet the "official misconduct" hurdle for recall, the official effectively needs to have been convicted of "official misconduct" in a court. (Foster v. Kovich, Steadman v. Hallard).

This is an incredibly high, if not impossibly high bar, for a recall petition to meet.

Have Any Recall Attempts in Montana Been Successful?

Most attempts at recall in Montana have failed. Many have been unable to collect and



verify all of the signatures within the 90 day statutory requirement. In a larger county, you may need 10,000 or more verified signatures. Most recall efforts don't have the funding to hire paid signature gatherers like CI-126, 127 and 128 most recently did. Other recall efforts were thrown out by the district courts because the court didn't feel they had met the '**for cause'** hurdle or because their petition didn't meet the form requirements. Some have been thrown out because they were slightly over the 200 statutory word limit of the petition. Others have failed because government lawyers convinced the petitioners to drop the case. While others have run the gauntlet and gotten all of the way to a recall election and failed to gain the 50% needed from the voters to recall the official.

There have been some successes however, although not always directly. In Stevensville, the recall effort against Mayor Brandon Dewey failed at the ballot box, but the effort encouraged the City police department to begin an investigation based on the claims the recall petitioners had made. The Mayor ended up pleading guilty to three misdemeanors and serving some time in prison.

How Should We Go Forward and What Can You Do?

It is clear that the '**for cause'** requirement in the current Recall Act (MCA 2-16-6) needs to be removed, so the law reflects what the voters overwhelming voted for in 1976. There are enough safeguards within the law to keep it from being abused.

There is currently proposed legislation in the 2025 session sponsored by Senator Jeremy Trebas. Call your Senators and Representatives and tell them to pass this legislation (draft bill LC0521).

Elect judges who are voter friendly and follow the constitution. This applies all the way from the District Courts to the Montana Supreme Court.

Attend your County, City and School board meetings and hold the people who work for us accountable to the voters.

If you are thinking about starting a recall petition there are a number of patriots in Montana that have attempted to recall. Reach out to them and learn what worked and what didn't. Who knows - they may even help you collect signatures!

To Conclude

The ability for the voters to recall elected and appointed officials who are not doing their job to the standards of their constituents is a right the Montana voters demanded in 1976. That effort was undermined by the same politicians and courts that it was intended to address. Now, 45 years later, it is time for that dream to be realized!

If you want to find out more about the Montana Recall Act you can find more details in the Montana Code Annotated, Title 2, Chapter 16, Part 6.

WERE THE VOTES ON YOUR BALLOT COUNTED CORRECTLY IN THE 2024 NOVEMBER GENERAL ELECTION

WRITTEN BY
Beth Cummings, Great Falls, Montana

If you took a large cash deposit to your bank, wouldn't you want a record that your deposit was made and for the exact amount you made it? Would you feel comfortable with the bank's policy that instead of verifying the actual deposit—instructed you to go on-line to your account where it just read, "Your deposit has been accepted today" with no verification of the amount? Or the bank simply took out a stack of stickers that read, "I deposited $$ today" and stuck it on your lapel -- again without verification of the amount of the deposit? In Cascade County, we deposit our ballots much like the above cash deposit-- without a verification of the amount of the deposit—the deposit of our actual votes. We deposit our ballots in a mail box or a ballot box to be counted through a central tabulator on election day that prints out the final total results. We are then told we can go on-line and see that the deposit we made (our ballot) was accepted. If voting at the polls, we simply received a little lapel sticker that says, "I Voted!" But, no one can say for sure how our actual votes on our ballots were counted, because the vote tabulating machine is not transparent to voters, and the two public performance testing of the machine to verify your votes were tabulated correctly were never conducted by our election administrator in Cascade County.

Cascade County uses an ES&S tabulator to count our ballots and our votes on those ballot. It also hires an Election Systems & Software (ES&S) technician (at approximately $5000 a day) to operate the tabulator, rather than having trained election judges in our county, from each party, perform this duty -- which is required by law. Furthermore, the public and poll observers are not allowed to view this process in any meaningful way and are kept at a great distance from the process. In fact, these observers have been vehemently scolded by the county election administrator, Terry Thompson, for using binoculars to try to get a closer look on how the machine is tabulating their ballots, their votes, for their election. Without trained election judges to operate the machine and without transparency and verifiable results that each vote on each ballot was counted, it is no wonder that people are trusting our government less and less in conducting our elections.

So how do we know that our actual votes on our individual ballots were counted correctly? Sadly, the answer is, we don't, because the tabulator that counted the votes was never tested properly by our election administrator in accordance with the Montana Secretary of State's directives. The election administrator must conduct two proper performance tests of the tabulator that should show that the marked ballots were counted in accordance with how voters darkened the ovals and for which candidates and ballot issues.

Before the November 2024 General Election, election administrator Thompson was required to conduct these two public performance tests. One public testing was to be conducted a few days before the election, and the second was to be conducted the day of the election before any official votes were run through the tabulator. Thompson, as the newly appointed election administrator, notified the public of the first "public testing". Several people attended. Thompson had prepared a stack of 10 "test ballots" from all 26 precincts. The ballots were marked in various ways to mimic the way real voters could possibly have voted these ballots. It is important to note that these ballots must include at least one vote for each candidate. Each candidate should have a different number of votes so as to not create a pattern that would

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make it impossible to know if the machine counted the votes correctly. They must also include undervotes, overvotes, blank votes, and write-in votes.

Before running the test deck, Terry asked someone from the audience to count the actual number of ballots in the test deck. I asked her if she planned on counting the number of actual votes on those ballots, and was told she would do that later. As the testing proceeded, it became obvious Thompson had no intention of counting the votes on each ballot during the public testing and in accordance with the Secretary of State's directives. She simply ran the ballots through two separate tabulators to verify that the two machines counted the number of ballots the same. That was not a public testing of the vote tabulating machine. It simply gave the appearance that she conducted a proper performance test of the tabulator. Needless to say, the tabulator failed to show the public that it could count the votes on the ballots correctly.

On the day of the election, I was present as a poll observer. I noticed elections administrator Thompson was proceeding to start running the official ballots through the tabulator. County Deputy Civil Attorney, Carrie Haight, was in attendance. I asked her when Thompson was going to conduct the required public testing of the machine. She said she did not know and made no effort to find out. Sheriff Jesse Slaughter was also in attendance. I told him that the machine that was about ready to count all of our votes was never tested previously and was required to be tested the day of the election. I attempted to give him the Secretary of State's official directives that required that testing. He refused to take the information. However, he did speak with Thompson and she told him that she already did the testing. I followed up after the election by speaking to the Cascade County Commissioners, who are now in charge of our elections. During public comment, I showed the directives and what was required. There has been no comment by either Commissioner Jim Larson or Commissioner Joe Briggs about these concerns.

When central tabulation through electronic machines became the new way of counting our votes, voters became concerned that these electronic machines could be tampered with in order to manipulate vote totals, and even change race outcomes. The lack of transparency in this process led to lack of trust in our elections which continues to grow as residents are waking up to learn about the election process and how it should be conducted, but sadly is not.

Voting is a fundament right. Voters should never be asked to put blind faith in the most sacred right of our republic. A closer look at the ballot and tabulation process will show the need for transparency and verifiable results to help secure this right. It will also show that the tabulator that is counting the votes on our ballots must undergo a proper performance test to verify that not only are their ballots being counted, but the actual votes for specific candidates and issues are also being counted. This testing must also be conducted before any official vote counting begins. One reason is that humans program the media card that is used to operate the tabulator – and humans can make mistakes.

Only a public performance test can verify whether the tabulator and the programming pass or fail in counting votes correctly. The reason is that each precinct in each election usually has its own unique ballot form created in accordance with MCA 13-12-205 that sets the placement of names and rotation of those names on the ballot giving each candidate an opportunity to have his or her name at the top of the list. In addition to rotation of names, precincts often have different candidates altogether for House and Senate District races. It is important to note that the tabulator cannot read the names on the ballot – only the darkened or blank ovals. The tabulator cannot treat the counting of all the ballots the same since each precinct's ballot form is not the same. Therefore, programming of the tabulator to include the different ballot forms is required so that each ballot form for each precinct is tabulated correctly for each vote.

The programming of the tabulator is done by ES&S who sold the county the machine. The programming is placed on a media card that the election administrator receives and inserts into the tabulator to allow it to operate and count ballots and votes on election day. The public needs to know the media card is empty of any data that could count votes saved from a previous election of test of the tabulator (Butte, MT counted both actual ballots and combined those numbers with the data from the tabulator's public accuracy test because their election administrator forgot to delete the test data from the media card).

The testing of the media card and how the tabulator is counting our votes must be conducted before any official votes are counted to ensure there are no programming mistakes on the media card. The testing must be done publicly and should be done before the election and again on election day before any official ballots and votes are run through the tabulator. The results of the testing must be shown to the public.

The program media card used in the tabulator is tested against a test desk of ballots that replicate the 26 different precinct ballots. These ballots should have the ovals previously marked to mimic all voting possibilities in that election. From these ballots, the election administrator should create a matrix which is simply a spreadsheet that shows each candidate and ballot issue. The test deck must be hand-counted publicly and each vote must be placed on the matrix. Each candidate or ballot issue must receive at least one vote. To avoid a pattern, each candidate or issue should have a different number of votes.

After the tabulator has run these test ballots through the machine, the actual votes for each candidate and ballot issue in each precinct should be compared to the hand-counted ballot/votes marked on the matrix sheet. The counts must match perfectly. If not, the official ballots should never be run until the programming of the media card has been fixed and retested.

There are many aspects of an election that we need to keep our eyes on in order to protect our vote. The tabulator that is counting our votes is very important. It is not good enough that voters were given a right to vote by darkening ovals for each candidate and issue of their free choice. We must also demand that our votes are being counted – and that the process is transparent and the results verifiable.

(What Happens - Vacates from page 3B)

He served in the appointment until the seat was up for election in the General Election of November, 2024. Tilleman did win that election and is now serving the full term.

A few things to point out:

In both County Commission and Legislative vacancies, if the vacating officer was a non-partisan party or independent, the Commissioners shall invite applications for the vacancy in a notice published and shall accept an application from any person who has lived in the unrepresented district for at least 2 years immediately preceding the day the vacancy occurs. Central Committees are not used in these cases.

If the vacant district in a Legislative vacancy crosses county lines, there are specific laws addressing procedures for joint appointment by County Commissioners of both counties.

If there are multiple vacancies on the Board of County Commissioners, and a quorum cannot be obtained, the County Compensation Board holds the authority to appoint the first vacancy of the Commissioner so there is a quorum of Commissioners to appoint the next vacancy.

And as you can imagine, there are specific timelines in statute so time is always of the essence.

What are the Events that Classify an Office As Vacant?

MCA 2-16-501. Vacancies created. An office becomes vacant on the occurrence of any one of the following events before the expiration of the term of the incumbent:

(1) the death of the incumbent;

(2) a determination pursuant to Title 53, chapter 21, part 1, that the incumbent suffers from a mental disorder and is in need of commitment;

(3) the effective date stipulated in the resignation of the incumbent;

(4) removal of the incumbent from office;

(continued on page 7B)

(What Gives You the Right? from page 1A)

upon request.

Generally, all Cascade County boards adhere to these rights of their citizens and their procedures are outlined in bylaws. However, your Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is one of the largest offenders of your Rights to Know and Participate and Open Meeting Laws. Other boards within the County government where these Constitutional Rights and Open Meeting Laws prevail over are Rural Volunteer Fire Department Boards, Planning Board, Rural Water/Sewer District Boards, Board of Health.

Right to Know and Participate and Open Meeting Laws are quite specific and readily disseminated. However, members of the BOCC discretionarily interpret **definitions** of "ministerial acts" and items of "significant public interest" referenced in statute, when determining how to adhere to these laws. In an Attorney General opinion of 1998 (47 A.G. Op 13), it is acknowledged that "*A **ministerial act** is generally performed pursuant to legal authority, and requires no exercise of judgment. A duty is to be regarded as ministerial when it . . . has been positively imposed by law, and its performance required at a time and in a manner or upon conditions which are specifically designated; the duty to perform under the conditions specified not being dependent upon the officer's judgement or discretion.*" In other words, signing a letter that was previously approved to sign in a lawful Board meeting or approving an employee time away from work as outlined in policy. That is ministerial.

The term "**significant interest to the public**" was defined by the 1997 legislature for purposes of the Montana Administrative Procedure Act (MCA 2-4-102 (12), as follows; "*agency actions under this chapter regarding matters that the agency knows to be of widespread citizen interest. These matters include issues involving a substantial fiscal impact to or controversy involving a particular class or group of individuals.*" Realizing that any issue could be extremely important to one individual and not raise concern to another, discretionary interpretation could readily lead to litigation, whereby the burden of proof would lie on the BOCC, at the taxpayer's expense.

One last definition to highlight is "**Public**". Often times we assume the Public to mean those who live within the jurisdiction of the governing body, or the taxpayers within the jurisdiction. The term "Public" when used in regard to meetings, means "*all persons*". Essentially, anyone, residing anywhere. Anyone, residing anywhere could have strong reasons to be interested in decisions and deliberations of Cascade County government.

Cascade County Commissioner Meetings in Review

Because these meetings were not recorded, it is not possible for the Public to ever access records of what took place.

2024

	# Meetings Posted	# Agendas Posted	# Minutes Recorded	% Meetings Posted with Minutes Recorded	Significant Subject of Meetings **Not** Recorded
January	15	8	8	53%	MACo Health Care Trust
February	10	5	5	50%	Pre-Trial Services Contract
March	17	6	6	35%	Montana DOT, USFS, DNRC and MRLOP Updates
April	32	7	23	72%	Budget Meetings
May	39	9	32	82%	
June	17	9	9	53%	
July	26	6	6	23%	Security Camera Discussion, Solid Waste Program, Print Shop, Sun River Watershed presentation, MRLOP
August	17	5	5	29%	County Mill Allocation Discussion
September	14	7	7	50%	
October	19	9	10	53%	GF Public Library Annual Report
November	14	8	8	57%	Solid Waste Program, Election Recount
December	6	2	2	33%	
Annual Total	**226**	**81**	**121**	**54%**	

2023

	# Meetings Posted	# Agendas Posted	# Minutes Recorded	% Meetings Posted with Minutes Recorded	Significant Subject of Meetings **Not** Recorded
January	21	5	5	24%	MACo Health Care Trust, Aging Bus Barn Discussion, Rep. Matt Rosendale visit
February	18	4	4	22%	MACo Health Care Rates, IPS Mail Service, MRLOP
March	26	8	8	31%	Nat'l Opioid Settlements, Mobile Home Seizure, Stray Moose Property Discussion, Montana DOT Updates
April	25	5	5	20%	Pre-flood Plan, MS4 Program
May	37	5	6	16%	Budget Meetings
June	23	7	8	35%	Budget Meetings, MACo Property Casualty Insurance
July	19	5	5	26%	State Fair Updates
August	33	6	8	24%	Budget Meetings, Aging Bus Barn, GFDA County Investment Overview
September	18	5	5	28%	
October	21	8	8	38%	Mtg. with Republic Services
November	18	7	7	39%	
December	15	8	8	53%	
Annual Total	**274**	**73**	**77**	**28%**	

2022

	# Meetings Posted	# Agendas Posted	# Minutes Recorded	% Meetings Posted and with Minutes Recorded	Significant Subject of Meetings **Not** Recorded
January	12	8	8	67%	Fox Farm State Lands Discussion
February	8	4	4	50%	Adobe Creek Discusson / Budget-Grants Updates
March	12	5	5	42%	ARPA Discussion
April	12	4	4	33%	ARPA Finalizing
May	34	5	5	15%	Budget Meetings, MACo renewal Mtg / Earmark Alcohol Tax Money
June	29	7	8	28%	Budget Meetings, ARPA Application Reviews
July	14	5	5	36%	Budget - Grants Updates, US Marshals' Contract, Public Safety Levy Discussion
August	13	7	7	54%	Budget Impacts on Newly Re-certified values
September	9	5	5	56%	Budget Review, Budget-Grants Updates
October	9	6	6	67%	
November	23	9	10	43%	Aging Bus Barn Discussion, ARPA Presentations, General Election Recount Board
December	11	5	6	55%	
Annual Total	**186**	**70**	**73**	**39%**	

* Majority of meetings without minutes are Elected Official and Department Head meetings. Much of the deliberations and discussion in these meetings are of significant interest to the Public, typically authorizing operations that impact taxpayer funding.

Last Updated: 1-14-2025

Right to Know and Participate and Open Meeting Laws apply when there is the presence of a quorum of a board. A **quorum** is defined as a majority of the members of the Board. The Board of County Commissioners is comprised of 3 members. Therefore, 2 County Commissioners hearing, discussing or deliberating creates a meeting and the potential for binding action. Thus the word 'quorum' implies a meeting, and the action is group action, not merely the action of a particular member as an individual. Lawful, binding action made by a quorum of County Commissioners (2 or more), must be made in the Public and minutes must be recorded in compliance with your Constitutional Right to Know and MCA Title 2, Chapter 3, Part 1.

What about deliberations and decisions by electronic means – email, phone, teleconferencing, texts? MCA 2-3-202 defines a meeting as, "*the convening of a quorum of the constituent membership of a public agency or association described in 2-3-203, whether corporal or by means of electronic equipment, to hear, discuss, or act upon a matter over which the agency has supervision, control, jurisdiction, or advisory power.*" Electronic exchanges of communications amongst a quorum (2 or more) of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) constitutes a public meeting. Should Board members find themselves in this situation, electronic dialogue should cease immediately and if binding action had taken place, a minute entry of the meeting must be made disclosing the binding action. The minute entry must then be presented at the next Board meeting for approval as with any meeting minutes, thereby also being presented to the Public.

In Cascade County, the general rule of operation given Elected Officials and Staff is to gain consent of 2 of the 3 Commissioners to proceed. Currently, accepted consent is obtained by electronic means, or by one-on-one conversation, or by phone call, or in quorum meetings that are not recorded – all methods of which divert a Public meeting. This unlawful directive not only silences the Public from participating in decisions made by the Board, but can also silence your elected representative from participating in decisions made on your behalf.

On December 19,1887, the Cascade County Board of Commissioners held their first Board meeting. Minutes were recorded and remain available for public access. The books in which Commissioner meetings are historically recorded are called Journals. From 1887 up to about 1996, the BOCC met daily and minutes were recorded daily. Every week meetings were held as follows; Monday generally reserved for Public Hearings and Bid Opening, Tuesday the Regular Board meeting was held and on Thursday, the Work Session for the upcoming Tuesday Board meeting was held. At the least, there were 2 Public meetings of the BOCC a week. In those days, the Sheriff, County Attorney, Treasurer, Justice Court Judges, County Surveyor, Personnel Director, Finance Office and other elected officials and Department Heads regularly attended meetings to give reports, presentations and to gain permission for binding action. These deliberations and decisions were recorded by minutes. Aside from daily meeting minutes, numerous minute entries from this time period are also available for public access. The Board secretary created the minute entries and they appear in the minutes of the next Board meetings, where they were approved by the Board and submitted to the Clerk and Recorder for permanent record storage. Additionally, the BOCC actively created committees to assist in government functions and services to the community such as the County Technology Committee, the County Insurance Committee and the County G.I.S. (Geographic Information Mapping Technology System) Committee. There were many more. County government operations were productive with cohesive weekly meetings and interaction amongst Elected Officials and staff. Communication was streamlined throughout County offices, offering the same to the citizens. This is how the other 'Big 6' Montana counties still do business and it is rewarding to visit their websites with the ability to access paths they took to reach decisions made for the betterment of their citizenry.

In 2004, Cascade County Commissioners passed a resolution to have bi-monthly Work Sessions and bi-monthly Board meetings. No more weekly meetings. The use of 'Special' meetings was implemented, although this process was not documented in the Resolution. 'Special' meetings were intended to be for situations where the item needing action was not prepared in time for presentation at the Regular Board meeting.

In 2005, meeting agendas still contained a section titled "Department Heads and Elected Official", where reports and presentations were made to the Commissioners and the Public regularly.

In 2018, meeting agendas no longer contained the section titled "Department Heads and Elected Officials" and staff comments show up rarely. There are no longer consistent records by minutes whereby the Public has access to reports

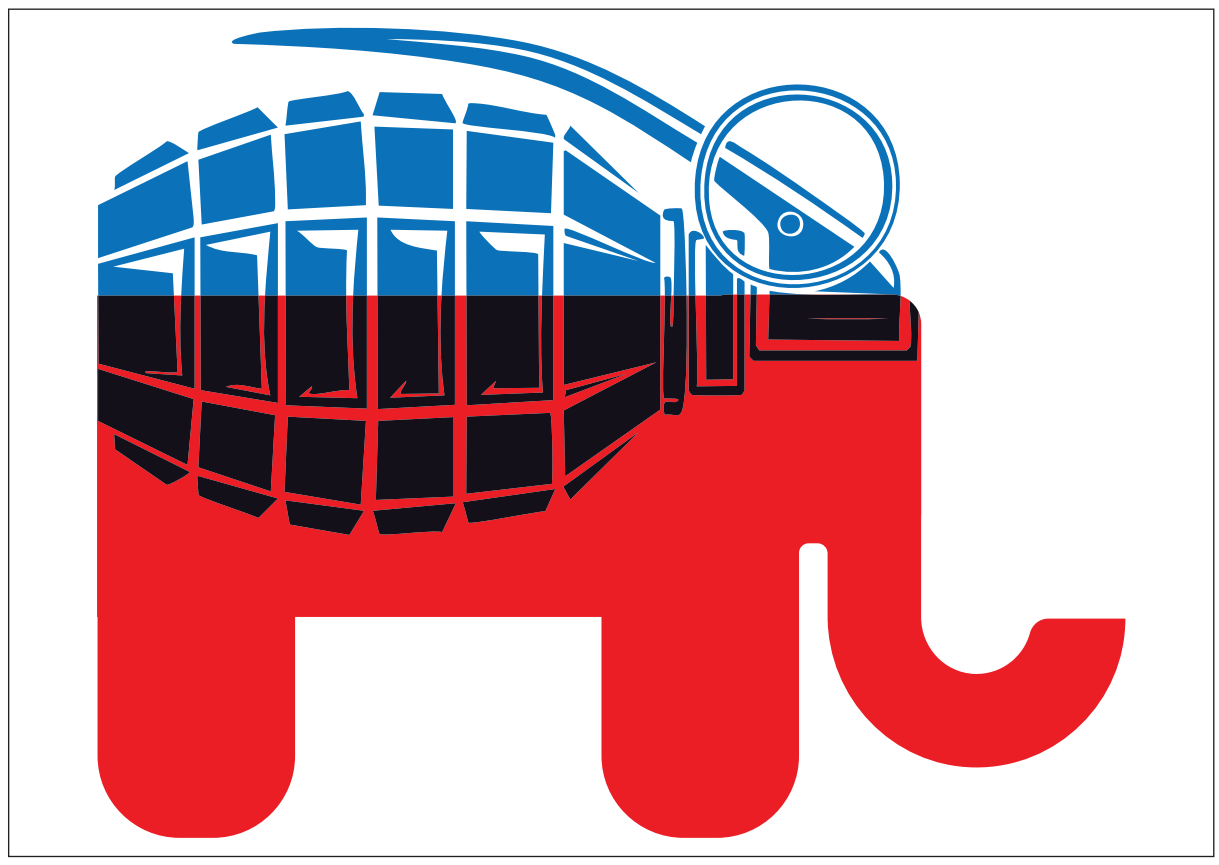
(continued on page 7B)

Conservatives Caught Off Guard Again. . .

Political Drama Continues

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

WRITTEN BY
Steve Vinnedge



In March of 2016, when Greg Gianforte announced his candidacy to unseat the hapless Steve Bullock's 2nd term, Democrats told us that Gianforte hated Montana sportsmen and wanted to close down their access to Montana's resources.

You see, Gianforte had purchased property on the East Fork of the Gallatin River. It was on a riverbend and he shared ownership of that riverbend with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), which had not yet developed the property for a Fishing Access Site (FAS).

After Gianforte built his home, FWP then developed the FAS, but instead of using their deeded easement to access the FAS from the county road, the contractor used Gianforte's driveway instead. Gianforte called the Region 3 FWP headquarters and asked that FWP please use their deeded easement instead of his driveway. That call was ignored. Gianforte then wrote a letter to the FWP headquarters in Bozeman and that letter was ignored as well. Gianforte then wrote a letter to the state FWP office in Helena and that letter was, well, you guessed it, ignored.

Gianforte then hired a lawyer, Art Wittich, to represent him in a lawsuit against FWP to force FWP to use the FWP easement and stop using the Gianforte driveway, which by now, was being traversed by the sportsmen of Gallatin County. FWP Director, Jeff Hagener, upon learning of the lawsuit inquired about the matter and quickly rectified the problem by directing the Region 3 Supervisor to construct a road on the FWP FAS easement from the county road to the Fishing Access Site. The road was completed as directed and Gianforte allowed the lawsuit to expire unanswered because the problem was thus cured.

Gianforte failed to address the accusations of blocking sportsmen's access to the river and his 2016 Governor campaign failed miserably because he had been framed as a rich millionaire stomping on the rights of Montana citizens.

Fast forward to 2024. Greg Gianforte as an incumbent Governor, uncharacteristically inserts himself into every legislative Republican primary and endorses the RINO in every instance. Montana voters accede to his endorsements and the most conservative members of the legislature are turfed out.

When it came time to elect the President of the Montana Senate, who do you suppose those RINO senators voted for?

Pat Flowers.

And what did Pat Flowers do before he retired?

He was the FWP Region 3 Supervisor that illegally used his neighbor's road to create a public Fishing Access Site on the banks of the East Fork of the Gallatin River, and forced that man, Greg Gianforte, to sue the State of Montana to get his road back. A lawsuit that cost him the Governor's race.

Proverbs 1:31: So you will get what you deserve; you will get what you planned for others.

(What Gives You the Right? from page 6B)

and presentation by County Elected Officials and Department Heads. In this research, there was not a Resolution found that officially changed having Department Head and Elected Official meetings without minutes. Currently, County Department Heads and Elected Officials meet with a quorum of County Commissioners, in meetings where no minutes are recorded.

In 2019, Public Comment no longer shows up in Work Session minutes and the directive that Public Comment is not allowed in Work Session makes its way throughout the community. In this research, there was not a Resolution found that officially eliminated Public Comment in BOCC Work Sessions. It was simply an enforced directive. Enforced by the BOCC and the County Deputy Civil Attorney.

In 2023, Public Comment in Work Sessions is brought back through a Resolution. This Public Comment is offered at the end of each meeting and the Public is allotted 7 minutes for each citizen commenting. Records available demonstrate the Board has not created a committee to assist in governmental functions in over a decade.

On January 14, 2025, Public Comment in all BOCC meetings was reduced to 4 minutes for each citizen commenting, through a Resolution. In a separate Resolution, a policy for the manner in which BOCC meetings are held, is passed. This Resolution includes an allowance for electronic deliberations and decisions which eliminates Public access. Minute entries are statutorily mandatory but past practices by BOCC and office staff will eliminate this obligation. Policies are only as good as the integrity of those enforcing them.

Why do these Constitutional Rights and State Laws mandate government officials to perform its business in front of the Public, and mandate deliberations and decisions be recorded and minutes accessible to the Public? Because . . .

The Public is the Government. Elected Officials are the Public Servants elected to do the will of the Public. Exercise Your Rights.

The information contained in this article was researched through lawfully recorded and archived meeting minutes available in the County Clerk and Recorder's Office. Unfortunately, proper meeting procedures have been stripped down over the past two decades. When compromised Right to Know, Right to Participate and Open Meetings Laws are practiced, there is no way for citizens to ever know how government decisions were made or derived, on their behalf. Educate yourself on these laws, research the County website for proper meeting postings, meeting recordings and meeting minutes. When you know your government is in violation – call them out. Violation of these laws is also a violation of elected officials' Oath of Office and is a reckless path toward costly lawsuits that will be funded by the County taxpayer.

(What Happens - Vacates from page 5B)

(5) the incumbent's ceasing to be a resident of the state or, if the office is local, of the district, city, county, town, or township for which the incumbent was chosen or appointed or within which the duties of the incumbent's office are required to be discharged;

(6) except as provided in **10-1-1008**, absence of the incumbent from the state, without the permission of the legislature, beyond the period allowed by law;

(7) the incumbent's ceasing to discharge the duty of the incumbent's office for the period of 3 consecutive months, except when prevented by sickness, when absent from the state by permission of the legislature, or as provided in **10-1-1008**;

(8) conviction of the incumbent of a felony or of an offense involving moral turpitude or a violation of the incumbent's official duties;

(9) the incumbent's refusal or neglect to file the incumbent's official oath or bond within the time prescribed;

(10) the decision of a competent tribunal declaring void the incumbent's election or appointment.

The Power of the County Central Committees

A County Central Committee means the designated body within a county in Montana that directs the activities of the republican or democrat party in their county. Central Committees are comprised of an elected board with four voting members representing at the state level party, which usually meets once a year to vote on the respective party platforms, vote to elect state party officers and vote on the rules for the respective state GOP or Democrat party.

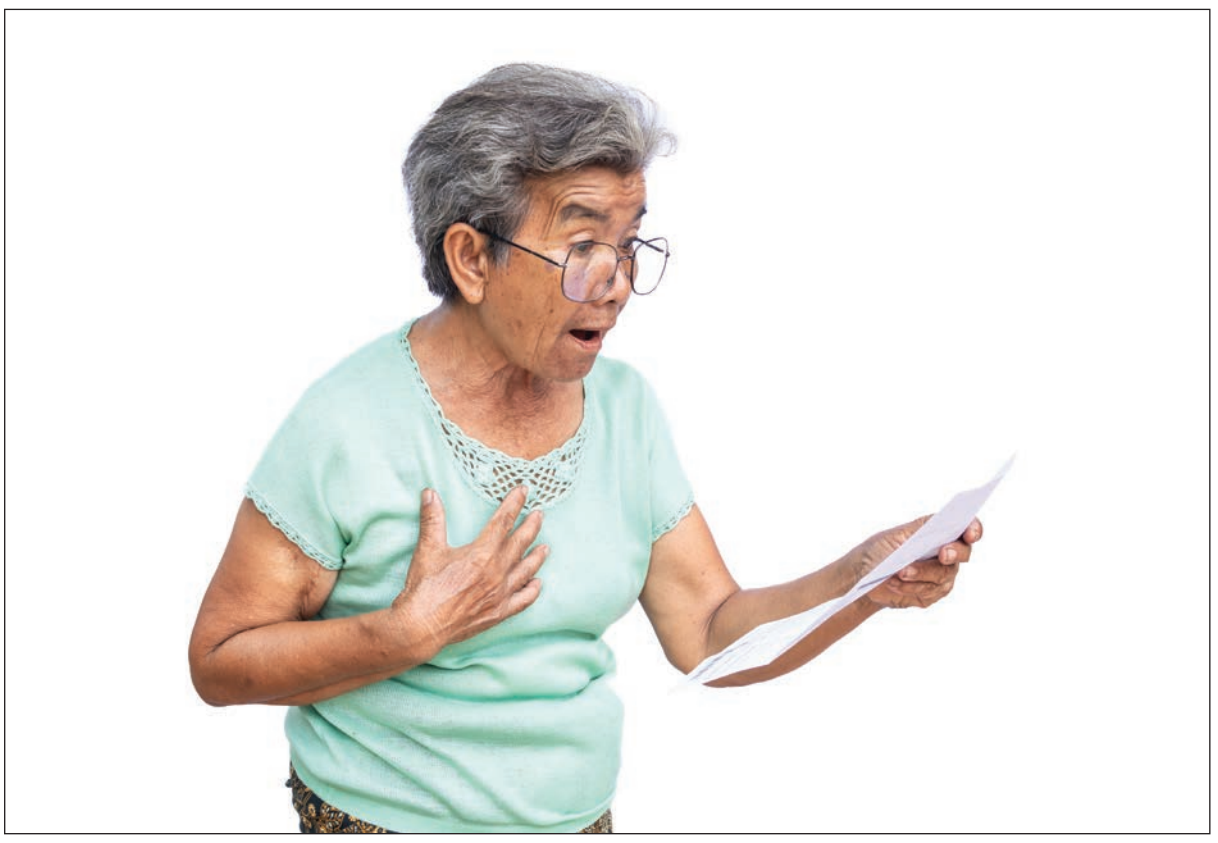
Aside from the elected board (elected by nomination of the membership), there are as many members on the central committee as there are precincts in that County x 2. The membership is made up of precinct committeemen and precinct committeewomen. These precinct positions are filled by County ballot election in the primary (June) every 2 years – in even numbered years. Did you notice these positions on your ballot in June of 2024?

It is not the Board members, but the precinct committeeman and committeewoman who are the most critical positions of the Republican and Democrat Central Committees. This is where the voting power lies . . . where the rubber meets the road. Only precinct committeemen and precinct committeewoman may vote in County Central Committee meetings. Unless Board members are also precinct committee persons, they may not vote.

More of this critical power is demonstrated with the ability of the Central Committees to nominate party candidates for appointment by County Commissioners. It is important that you fill your Central Committee with precinct committee persons who truly stand for your values, and consider running for these positions yourself. Precinct committeeman and committee women positions are a great place for citizens to start their public service. Again, these position are up for election every two years. Think about running to represent your precinct in June of 2026!

Garbage In – Garbage Out

WRITTEN BY
Mary K. Embleton, Sand Coulee, Montana



There's one thing all of us humans produce, and that's Garbage, also known as Solid Waste. And one of our biggest challenges has been what to do with that Solid Waste. If you live in town, you probably have garbage pick-up service once a week, provided by your municipal government, and paid for via your monthly water and/or sewer bill.

If you live in the country, you probably have to haul your own garbage to a collection site. In Cascade County, that collection site is made possible through the county government, i.e. the Cascade County Commissioners.

Solid Waste management is big business and has evolved over the past 50-75 years. I remember as a kid that we had several "burn barrels" on the farm, and we would periodically burn our garbage to reduce the volume. Then we would dispose the ashes. The government eventually stepped in to regulate the problem, and now it is up to the government to provide the service for "health" reasons. But there is a lengthy process to follow, and it's spelled out in state law.

In 1971, the Board of Commissioners of Cascade County created a Special Improvement District for Refuse Disposal in Cascade County Montana via Resolution 37240. The process involved passing "…a resolution of intention to create such a district co-extensive with the boundaries of Cascade County and including all territory within said boundaries except the incorporated cities and towns of Belt, Cascade, Great Falls, and Neihart has been published for 10 consecutive days in a daily newspaper of general circulation within said Cascade County and has been posted within the said Cascade County in three public places and has been transmitted to the executive heads of incorporated cities and towns within the proposed district for consideration by the respective city or town councils;".

The Notice must describe the characteristics and costs of the collection system, and set a time and place for a Public Hearing where the "… Commissioners would hear and pass upon all protests that may have been made against the maintenance and operation of the said district,"

The notice was published starting on July 29, 1970 and set a deadline of August 28, 1970 at 5:00 pm for property owners to file written protests to the creation of the district. The Public Hearing was scheduled for September 4, 1970 at the District courtroom in the City of Great Falls.

After the hearing, there weren't enough protests filed to stop the creation of the district, so on April 2, 1971, the Board resolved to create and establish the Cascade Rural Solid Waste District. The District was to be governed by a Board of Directors which consisted of "….the City-County Board of Health of Cascade County, Montana.

The resolution also contained 4 additional provisions outlining the boundaries of the district, the costs of services to be met by an assessment levied by the board and other guidelines. The process was lengthy, transparent and involved public participation.

Special Districts are utilized everywhere in Montana. They are created for a distinct purpose and the funding, both revenue and expense aspects, can only be used for said purpose. Most are also governed by a separate board, such as rural water and sewer districts, irrigation districts, cemetery districts, and road improvement districts just to name a few. A separate board was created to govern the Cascade Rural Solid Waste District, but on November 27, 2007 the Cascade County Commissioners assumed the duties of the Solid Waste District Board.

Fast-forward to 2024: the Solid Waste fund on the county's books is in the Red. There was not enough money to pay the bills to Republic Services at the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2024). The budget had to be amended twice – increased by around $200,000 – apparently due to the newly negotiated contract with Republic Services. Is this any way to operate? Who negotiated the contract?

The assessments that are collected via your Property Tax bill are the main source of income, but they hadn't been changed since Resolution 12-60, passed on August 31, 2012. At that time, the notice of the proposed increase and scheduled public hearing was published twice. The proposed assessments listing all 57 categories of property were available for review….all following Section 7-11-1025, MCA. The Public Hearing was held on August 31, 2012 in conjunction with the annual budgeting process, also in accordance with the statute.

This was the last time the Solid Waste Assessments were properly increased.

However, Cascade County Commissioners failed to do the same process in July/August/September of 2024 during the budget process. Even though they knew the assessments had to be addressed and most likely increased, since they hadn't been increased since 2012, the proper steps to prepare the estimated annual costs of the program in order to specify the total Solid Waste Assessment for the fiscal year, were not done! The commissioners were told there was more to the process by a couple of different sources, but those sources were ignored. No public hearing was held regarding Solid Waste during the September 5, 2024 meeting to adopt the Fiscal Year 2025 budget.

Two weeks later, the commissioners held a meeting on September 19, 2024 to discuss the Solid Waste program and increase the "fees". No Public Hearing was Noticed prior to the meeting, nor was it held during the meeting. The action taken was to increase only Residential properties by 45%. Discussions were held going to 50% but one commissioner offered to only go to 45%. At that meeting, portions of Section 7-11-1025 MCA were read aloud to the commissioners during the public comment portion of the meeting. The resolution was passed by a 2-1 vote with Commissioner Grulkowski voting against.

Lo and behold, the commissioners then realized that the other 56 assessment categories/codes were not included in the resolution, so they had to hold another special meeting on October 3, 2024. That amounts to between $400,000 and

Sample Protest Form

TAX PROTEST FORM

1. The tax must be paid under protest **before** the tax becomes delinquent **(NO DI… TAXES MAY BE PROTESTED).** Generally, the taxes on commercial and residential property are due on or before November 30th and May 31st.
2. The tax payment must be accompanied by a written protest.
3. The payment must be paid to the property officer. In the case of Cascade County, all protests must be paid to the Cascade County Treasurer.
4. The written protest must specify the grounds or reasons the taxes are being paid under protest and the amount paid under protest must directly relate to the grounds specified. The amount of the protest shall not exceed the difference between the payment for the preceding year, and the amount owing for the tax year being protested, unless a different amount results from the specified grounds of the protest.
5. To process the protest, the taxpayer must do one or more of the following:
   A. Appeal to the County Tax Appeal Board.
   B. Appeal to State Tax Appeal Board
   C. Participant of Class Action Suit
   D. Taxpayer has 90 days from date of mailing to file suit within District Court

If the taxpayer does not comply with any of the above, the County Treasurer shall disperse the amount paid under protest to the appropriate funds.

The protest is cited under M.C.A. 15-1-402, plus the alternative remedy M.C.A. 15-1-406.

PARCEL# 0004051600 **1ST** X **2ND** ____ **FULL** ____

RECEIPT # 30215 **AMOUNT $** 1,052.23

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 15A, Amended Plat PL-2022-19, Townsite of Brown, Section 18-T19N-R05E, Cascade County, MT

A portion of the said taxes in the amount ($) 27.22 **is deemed unlawful and illegal and accordingly is paid under protest by:** James E. & Mary K. Embleton (Taxpayer's name)

Reason of Protest: Solid Waste Special Assessment increase was NOT done lawfully under MCA 7-11-1025.

1. Was this appealed?	YES ____	NO Y
2. Awaiting Tax Appeal Board Decision	YES ____	NO X
3. Class Action	YES ____	NO X
4. Other MCA 7-11-1027	YES X	NO ____

I HAVE READ THE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE PROTEST FORM. I ALSO UNDERSTAND IF NO ACTION IS TAKEN WITHIN 90 DAYS OF THE DATE OF THE NOTICE OF TAXES DUE, THE COUNTY TREASURER SHALL DISPERSE THE AMOUNT PAID UNDER PROTEST TO THE APPROPRIATE FUNDS. NON-COMPLIANCE WILL RESULT IN A VOIDED PROTEST.

TAXPAYER'S SIGNATURE Mary K. Embleton 12/30/2024

How To Protest and Appeal The 45% Increase To Your Rural Solid Waste District Assessment

To All **Cascade County** Rural Solid Waste District Property Owners

When you received your 2024 Property Tax bill, were you aware your Solid Waste District Assessment went up by 45%? Did you know this was coming? Would you like to do something about it?

As taxpayers who recently were encumbered a 45% increase to your Rural Solid Waste Assessment on your property taxes, you are encouraged to **Protest and Appeal this increase**.

Montana law is very clear on how the Cascade County Commissioners can increase the assessment for this service . . . and they DID NOT follow law, specifically *Section 7-11-1025, MCA*. Your Right to Know and Right to Participate in the process was VIOLATED. No Public Hearing was held to Inform you and to allow you to Participate. That gives you the right to **Protest and Appeal the Increase**.

Homeowners' increase on their Residence is $54/year. Other users, such as schools, businesses, farms and ranches, etc., went up substantially. If you are not happy about what was done, and HOW it was done, you have the right to **Protest and Appeal this increase.**

To Protest, simply fill out the **Tax Protest Form** available at the Cascade County Treasurer's office or on their website here; https://www.cascadecountymt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/581/Tax-Protest-Form-PDF The "AMOUNT $" line is the total tax amount you paid toward your tax bill, whether it was the 1st half or full amount being paid. Then, please enter only the first half of the increase on the assessment in the second "amount ($)" line. ($27.00 for residential property). In the "Reason of Protest" line, it is recommended to write something to the effect that "the increase was not done lawfully". And finally, write "Section *7-11-1027, MCA*" in #4, and check "YES". The Protest form is to be filed with the County Treasurer's Office. *This form instructs the County Treasurer to put the increase portion ($27, etc.) in a separate fund that can't be used by the County until the matter is resolved.* You will also need to include your tax payment receipt. If your tax payment was escrowed, the Cascade County Treasurer's Office can provide that receipt for you, or direct you to the website to retrieve it.

To Appeal, simply write a letter addressed to the County Commissioners, stating you are Appealing the increase to your Rural Solid Waste Assessment (sample attached). The reason for the Appeal is that the Commissioners DID NOT follow the law, specifically Section *7-11-1025, MCA*. You may also state that you were not aware of the increase until you received and/or paid your 2024 Property Tax bill. Be sure to list your parcel number on your letter of Appeal. The Board of County Commissioners are the Solid Waste District Board. *Unlike customary Tax Protests, this is a protest of the Rural Solid Waste Assessment only and has NOTHING to do with property values and property taxes. Therefore, the Department of Revenue has no involvement in this process.* That seemed to be a concern with a few of the folks regarding filing this protest.

The due date to file a Protest form is unknown because the County has no written guidelines on protesting an assessment, and there is no prior knowledge of citizens using their ability to protest an assessment in County history. However, the County Commissioners are the governing body of the assessment and will have to administer procedures.

These steps need to be completed as soon as possible. By tying up the funding from the Rural Solid Waste Assessment only, the Commissioners should be compelled to resolve the **Appeals** in order to release the **Protested** funds. Remember to retain copies of what you submit, for your records.

Please share these forms with taxpayers who would be willing to file a **Protest and Appeal** of the Rural Solid Waste Assessment imposed in 2024 in Cascade County. There is strength in numbers so the more people who **Protest and Appeal**, the more likely something can be done.

Sample Appeal Letter to County Commissioners

January 7, 2025

Board of Directors
Cascade County Rural Solid Waste District
325 2nd Ave. N., Room 111
Great Falls, MT 59401

Re: Appeal of Cascade County Rural Solid Waste District Assessment Increase
As Enacted via Resolution 24-39 on September 19, 2024, and Further Amended
As Enacted via Resolution 24-43 on October 3, 2024.

Dear Board:

We are property owners in rural Cascade County and are appealing the increase to the Cascade County Rural Solid Waste District Assessment as shown on our property tax statement. Our property is located at 74 2nd St., Sand Coulee, Montana 59472, and listed as parcel #0004051600.

Since there appears to be no written process for this action for Cascade County, this is our written notice to you of our appeal. The following are our reasons for the appeal:

1. No Notice of a Proposed Increase was ever published in the *Great Falls Tribune* informing the public that the proposed Assessments were available for review by the public as required by Section 7-11-1025, MCA.
2. No Notice of Public Hearing was ever published in the *Great Falls Tribune* informing the public that a Public Hearing on the proposed increase would be scheduled by the Board as required by Section 7-11-1025, MCA.
3. There was no list describing the lot or parcel of land assessed with the name of the owner of the lot or parcel, and the amount assessed contained in or referred to in either Resolution 24-39 or Resolution 24-43.
4. The Board was informed that a specific process was required to increase the Solid Waste Assessment at the September 5, 2024 Special Meeting, the September 19, 2024 Special Meeting, and the October 3, 2024 Special Meeting. There was ample opportunity and time to follow the governing statutory requirements.

Appeal Board nor the Montana Department of Revenue has jurisdiction in this matter. We await your response to this Appeal.

Sincerely yours,

James E. Embleton Mary K. Embleton

James E. and Mary K. Embleton
74 2nd St.
Sand Coulee, MT 59472
Phone: (406) 736-5669
Email: embleton2@3rivers.net

Are you moving, or going to the dump?

$500,000 in additional revenue. Significant interest to the Public? I would say so. But again, no Notice to the public, and no Public Hearing. Yet again the resolution was passed by a 2-1 vote with Commissioner Grulkowski voting against.

The result of this incompetent and illegal debacle was that the Tax Bills were late. This was the initial factor causing the delay….the Treasurer's office needed to update all of the property tax bills to reflect the 45% increases in all properties in the District. It must be noted here that the software used to calculate the Solid Waste Assessments in Cascade County is under the control of Commissioner Briggs.

So, what can be done about this? One remedy is to file a lawsuit against the county. That was done on November 4, 2024, but the judge denied it on December 31, 2024. A reason given was that not all remedies were exhausted, meaning that the Appeal and Protest steps had not been done yet. Well, now is the time to do just that! Property owners can file the Protest form with the Treasurer's office to tie up the increase in the funding. Along with the Protest, property owners can file an Appeal letter with the Commissioners.

This needs to be done sooner rather than later. The more appeals and protests filed, the greater chance that the Commissioners will have to take action to correct their egregious disregard of the People's Right To Know and Participate as guaranteed in our Montana Constitution.

Bio

Mary K. Embleton was raised on a farm and ranch on the Hi-Line. She worked for the Department of Revenue's Property Assessment Division from 1987 to 1994, during the first major reappraisal cycle. At that time, reappraisals were done every 10 years. She worked for municipal government for the next 15 years as a City Clerk/Treasurer. During that time she also served as Secretary and later as President of the Montana Municipal Clerk-Treasurers and Finance Officers Association, as well as serving on the board of the Montana League of Cities and Towns. Embleton worked for a year for the Cascade City-County Health Department as the Administrative Services Manager AND as the Chief Financial Officer for the Community Health Care Center when both operations were jointly operated by the county. She then worked for a little over 4 years as the Fiscal Officer for Opportunities, Inc. before going back to work for Cascade County as the Budget Officer/Grants Coordinator for 6½ years, retiring on November 30, 2022.

Know Your Current Elected Cascade County Officials

County Commissioner, Chair
District 2
Jim Larson
406-454-6816
jlarson@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2014
Current Term: 2020 - 2026

County Commissioner, District 1
Joe Briggs
406-454-6815
jbriggs@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2004
Current Term: 2022 - 2028

County Commissioner, District 3
Eric Hinebauch
406-454-6814
ehinebauch@cascadecountymt.gov

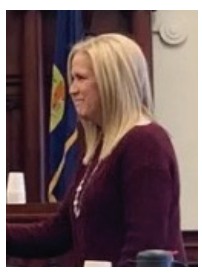
First Elected 2024
Current Term: 2024 - 2030

County Attorney
Josh Racki
406-454-6915
jracki@cascadecountymt.gov

Appointed 2017
First Elected 2018
Current Term: 2022 - 2026

County Sheriff
Jesse Slaughter
406-454-6820
jslaughter@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2018
Current Term: 2022 - 2026



County Clerk of Courts
Tina Henry
406-604-7796
Thenry2@mt.gov

Appointed 2020
First Elected 2020
Current Term: 2024 - 2028

Cascade County Treasurer
Diane Heikkila
406-454-6855
dheikkila@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2018
Current Term: 2022 - 2026

County Clerk and Recorder
Sandra Merchant
406-454-6801
smerchant@cascadecountymt.gov

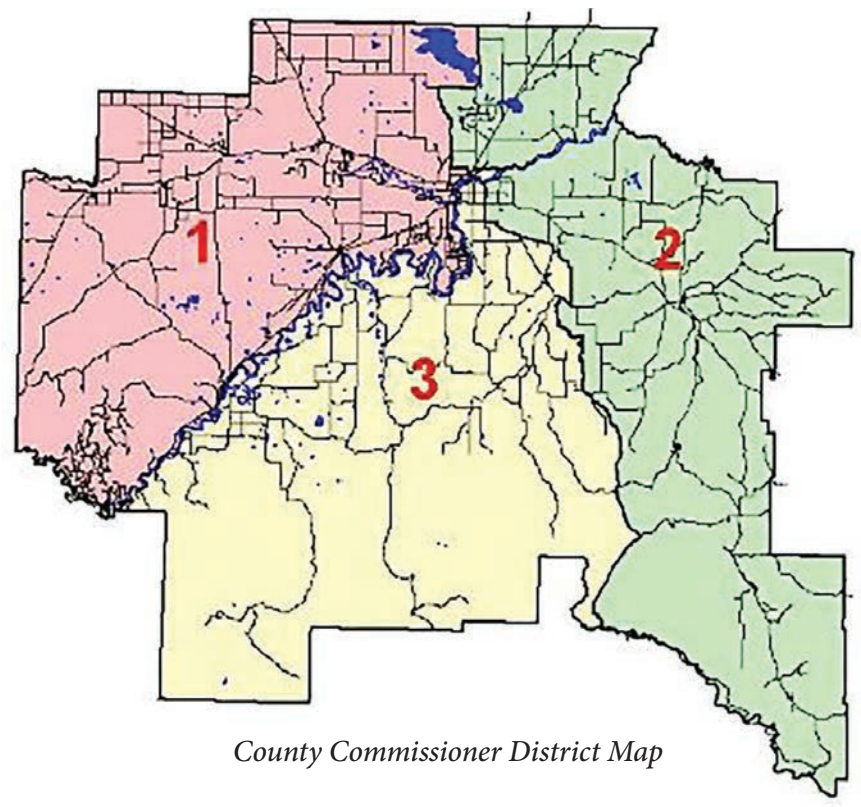
First Elected 2022
Current Term: 2022 - 2026

Public Administrator
Gerald Boland
406-453-0371

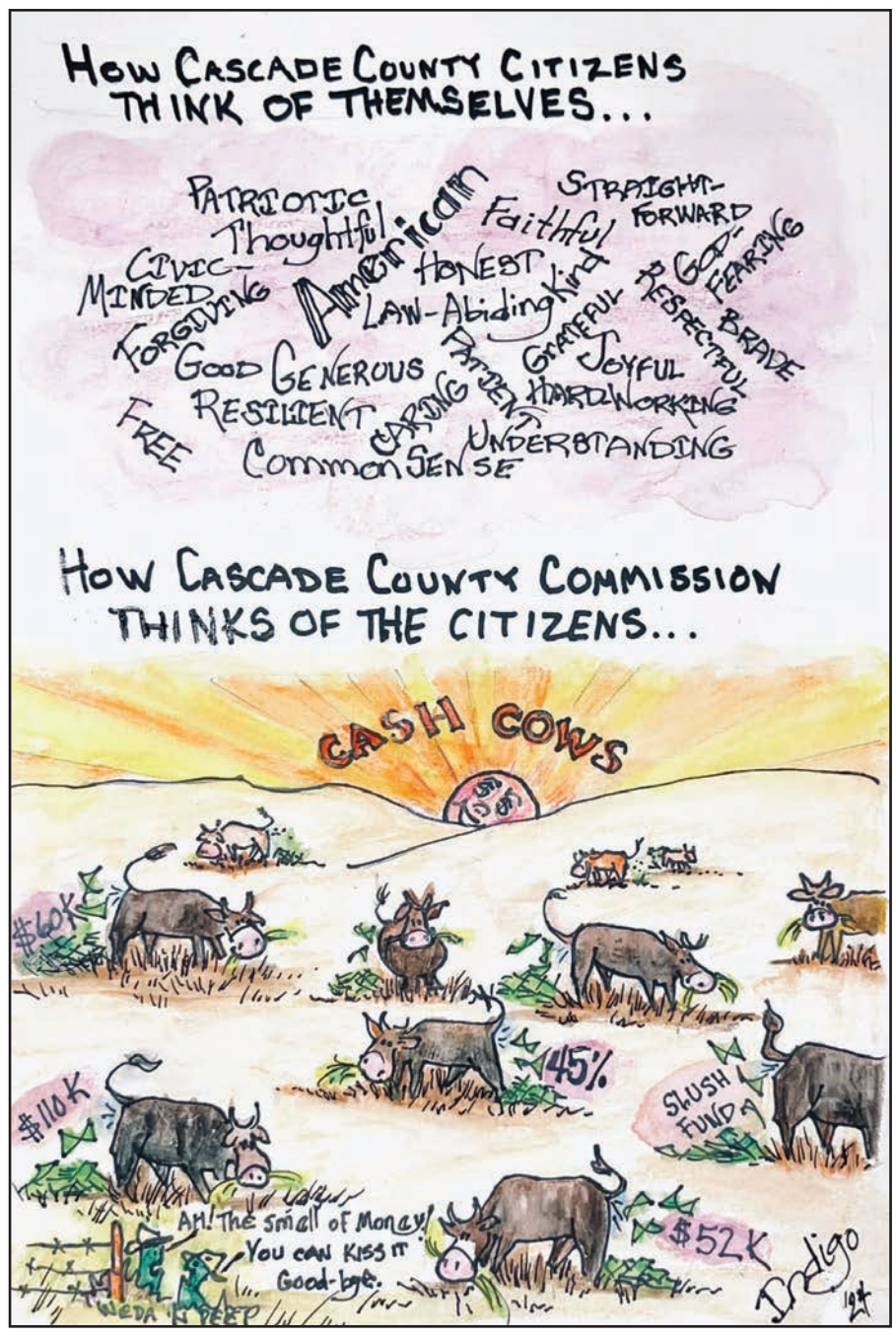
First Elected 2004
Current Term: 2022 – 2026

Justice Court Judge
Eric Bailey
406-454-6876
ebaily@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2022
Current Term: 2022 - 2026



County Commissioner District Map



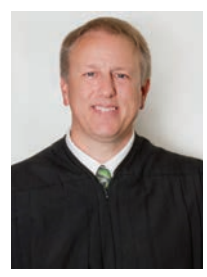
Justice Court Judge
Steven Fagenstrom
406-454-6875
sfagenstrom@cascadecountymt.gov

First Elected 2006
Current Term: 2022 - 2026

8th Judicial District Court Judges

Elizabeth Best	406-771-3950
David Grubich	406-454-6896
John Kutzman	406-454-6897
John Parker	406-771-6509


Elizabeth Best


David Grubich


John Kutzman


John Parker

(MT's Conservative Politics from page 2B)

is not rated ***red*** even though the state has a Republican majority in the legislature is because, aside from quite a strong presence of Democrats in the Treasure State, we also have an elected presence of RINOs, as this week's performance in electing the Democrat Senator Pat Flowers to the Montana Senate President position reveals.

What does this mean for Cascade County? Conservatives did not fare well in the 2024 County Election process. Keep a close eye on the Cascade County Commission. We already know two of the three Commissioners do not necessarily appreciate the Montana Code Annotated; they would likely shred it if given the opportunity and in some ways they have. To be fair, a critique of newly elected County Commissioner Eric Hinebauch will not be a focus of this article. Giving new officials an opportunity to prove themselves is only fair; guilt by association isn't always the best rule of thumb, but we shall see. Performance in his last official position with the Great Falls City Commission may not be indicative of how he will perform as a County Commissioner.

What can you do to help? Write to your Representatives in both the Senate and the House, and write to them often. In the future (which means now) get involved with conservative civic groups in your area and help them fight for your constitutionally conservative values. There are many conservative groups, but there is truly very little involvement from the general public. Most of the groups that do the heavy lifting have fewer than 20 people each; they need your support. If you can't personally be present at meetings, give them monetary support. If you cannot support these groups monetarily, your presence and personal help is invaluable. Don't leave your liberties and values up to the hard work of others. Get involved!

(Watts Inside? from page 4B)

horizon and your view," he said. It is attitudes like this that cause issues.

Bob Sostakowski, who's lived in Crawford County, Ohio, for more than two decades and joined the local anti-wind effort after he became aware of proposed projects popping up in his and neighboring communities, said there's more than aesthetics at stake.

"I had no opinion one way or another on wind until this," Sostakowski, 48, said. "There's an obvious and very provable negative impact on property values and people's standard of living."

Both Sostakowski and Kimberly Groth, 42, who lives in neighboring Seneca County and was heavily involved in the effort to defeat wind projects there and in Crawford, said it's not reasonable to expect people in agricultural areas to put up with commercial wind farms.

"People want quality of life and people move to rural areas because of the peacefulness of it. When you introduce industrial scale wind over tens of thousands of acres, you're interrupting that quality of life," Groth said.

"I think we've heard for 20 to 30 years now about renewable energy and there's just this assumption that it's good and that it's going to save us. So I think for me personally the more I looked into it, the more I realized it does have downsides. … Every form of energy has these pros and cons."

Sostakowski rejected the notion that farmers and landowners should have the right to lease their property to big wind developers whether or not their neighbors agree.

"There is a big distinction between commercial farming and agriculture and the heavy industrial production of electricity," he said. "At no point in our history has it been OK for people to do whatever they want."

Sostakowski added that when he was a kid, a bald eagle sighting was so rare, his parents would pull the family car over to catch a glimpse of one. Decades later, the fact that a wind project can get a "take permit" for eagles or other protected birds that run into the blades is "unfathomable," he said, for an intermittent energy generation source that takes up lots of space.

"What a horrendous and irresponsible waste of resources, our manpower, our tax dollars and our wildlife," he said.

The counterpoint came from both farmer Mike Brady who leased his land for wind turbines and Zartman. Zartman, the former Paulding County commissioner, said the turbines have been a windfall for rural Paulding's local school and government coffers.

"As a county, we were virtually bankrupt," Zartman said. Paulding, entirely reliant on agriculture and which had a population of about 19,000 as of 2021, had been hit hard by the recession that began in 2007.

"No Man Is an Island" is a well known saying that seems to advance the thought that all persons are connected to each other by common goals and obligations. The same can be said for real property: "No land exists in isolation." If one owns land, one must deal with all the people that surround the land and who own land that gives access to one's land. This simple fact has led to a thousand years of common law followed by statutory law as to the rights and obligations of property owners whose lands abut.

In a report updated last year, the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School found that "in nearly every state, local governments have enacted policies to block or restrict renewable energy facilities and local opposition has resulted in the delay or cancellation of particular projects."

Not including what it called "reasonable regulations," the 2022 edition of the report found 121 local policies (up 17.5% from 2021) that block or restrict renewable energy and 204 contested renewable energy facilities (up 23.6%).

"My guess is that we're going to need a lot of renewables built on public lands further west, just because we're seeing so much opposition growing up, especially sort of the middle of the country that's already very dense on wind," said Rich Powell, CEO of Clear Path, a nonprofit policy group working to curb carbon emissions.

But is the west prepared for the onslaught of wind and solar installations, especially in light of so many concerns and questions?

Productivity of Wind and Solar is a National Security Issue

According to cleanpower.org, there are more than 72,000 wind turbines across the country. Current estimates figure to fully power the United States with wind energy, it would require approximately 1.26 million wind turbines-just image that footprint and considering the amount of bird kills, and whether we would have any birds or migration of them left. Not only will this take over a lot of productive agriculture land and ruin view corridors, it can lead to unfunded mandates for the landowner and counties where they are located.

Current wind power capacity totals 151 GW, making it the fourth-largest source of electricity generation, but also the most unreliable because the wind doesn't always blow and ice can stop the blades from turning as well.

So, what are the studies on productivity during adverse conditions such as ice on wind turbine blades. Wind turbine blades spinning through cold, wet conditions can collect ice nearly a foot thick on the yard-wide tips of their blades. That disrupts blade aerodynamics and the balance of the entire turbine; which can disrupt energy production by up to 80 percent, according to a recently published field study led by Hui Hu, Iowa State University's Martin C. Jischke Professor in Aerospace Engineering and director of the university's Aircraft Icing Physics and Anti-/De-icing Technology Laboratory.

Hu wanted to quantify what happens on wind farms during winter weather and so several years ago began organizing a field study. But that was more complicated than he expected. Even in Iowa, where some 5,100 wind turbines produce more than 40% of the state's electricity (according to the U.S. Energy Information Association), he wasn't given access to turbines. So, Hu asked a Chinese wind farm who had similar turbines to those used in the U.S.

Energy companies usually don't want their turbine performance data to go public.

The researchers found that icing had a major effect: "Despite the high wind, iced wind turbines were found to rotate much slower and even shut down frequently during the icing event, with the icing-induced power loss being up to 80%," the researchers wrote.

Consumers Energy Bills

When wind turbines stop producing power, back-up power must be purchased and like in the case of Texas a few years back, that means buying more expensive power from other states which can cause a $200 monthly bill to increase to $2000 overnight.

Effects on the Economy through Lost Manufacturing

In 2007, Minnesota became an early adopter in mandating the use of wind and solar on the state's electric grid, passing the Next Generation Energy Act (NGEA). This legislation mandated that 25 percent of Minnesota's electricity come from "renewable" resources by 2025, and it has caused electricity prices to soar.

Historically, Minnesota enjoyed the advantage of relatively cheap electricity, with rates typically 18 percent less than the national average. However, since spending an estimated $10 billion on building wind farms and billions more on new and upgraded transmission lines, Minnesota has lost this competitive advantage with little to show for it, except higher electric bills. As electricity generation from carbon free wind approaches 20 percent of total generation, Minnesota has not experienced any appreciable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions relative to the U.S. average.

The Northern Foundry in Hibbing, Minnesota closed in April 2024 due to increased electric costs. The foundry was a major customer of Minnesota Power, and its closure is an example of how high electricity rates can force industrial businesses to close.

Groceries gone wild:

According to Business Energy Advisor, grocery stores use 52.5 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity *per square foot* per year. An average Albertsons or Winco Foods store is 75,000 square feet, which means an average store consumes 3.9 million kWhs of electricity every year (the equivalent of 519 homes). This means grocery stores like Cub Foods have seen a massive increase in their electricity bills in recent years. Based on the U.S. Energy Information, the average store would have seen its electricity bill increase by nearly **$108,700 per year since 2020**, growing from $413,217 in 2020 to $521,943 in 2022 and costs have continues to climb through 2024.

With electricity costs surging this way, is it any wonder that food prices keep going up?

Public Safety:

Unless you live in a rural community you often don't think about medical life flights. In a memo to Fond du Lac, WI residents, Flight for Life stated they would no longer be servicing their area because the 400 foot turbines make it too dangerous to land helicopters. In a rural community without a hospital or needed services in the case of an emergency, losing a Flight for Life can mean the difference between life and death.

National Security/Department of Defense:

Wind turbines can interfere with radar systems used for missile defense by blocking or distorting electromagnetic waves. This can make it harder to detect missiles and when wind turbines are installed offshore, it makes it harder to detect submarines.

In fact, in November, Sweden's government blocked the construction of 13 offshore wind farms over concerns that they would shorten the country's early-warning window for a Russian missile attack.

In the November issue of Defense News, it was reported that wind farms can interact with radar signals, reducing the quality of the situational air picture or even outright blocking out parts of the sky.

"The reaction time in the event of a missile attack could go from 2 minutes to 60 seconds with wind farms in the way," Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson wrote in a series of posts on X, formerly known as Twitter. They were accompanied by a schematic drawing of the wind farms casting a "shadow" behind them in which missiles and cruise missiles would stay undetected.

"Radar interference can impede air traffic control, weather forecasting, homeland security, and national defense missions," U.S. Department of Energy spokesperson wrote in an email to Defense News.

There are a number of ways that wind turbines, and especially large groups of them, can mess with the readings from a radar system. For one, they can show up on the screen because, just like any other object, they bounce back the electromagnetic waves that radar relies on. The fact that they are moving – the blades are spinning, and the turbines can change orientation – can make it more difficult for analysts to filter out the noise and find actual threats in the skies.

With the wingtips rotating at a speed of up to 370 kilometers per hour (around 230 mph), they move fast enough for doppler radars to sense them as moving objects, resulting in a false positive on an operator's screen.

Radar systems vary greatly so what might work for one can be completely ineffective on another. Over-the-horizon radars, for example, might be especially affected by offshore wind farms. As the name suggests, these systems have a much greater range than other radars, which are generally limited to the line of sight of the antenna and so cannot see past the curvature of the earth.

The longer-range variants bounce their beams off the ionosphere layer of the atmosphere before the waves travel back close to the surface – where wind farms can get in the way and may completely block out

(continued on page 12B)

A Call to Action - Protecting Our Legacy

WRITTEN BY
JW Thompson

Sometimes, we feel led to speak or act, even when we don't fully understand why. As I sit down to write this, I feel compelled to share these thoughts for someone specific—though I don't know who you are. Perhaps you're someone grappling with what to do, questioning whether you have the strength, or wondering if your efforts will even matter. If that resonates, then this is for you…

The quiet rhythm of rural life is something to be cherished. The rolling fields, the hum of tractors, the scent of freshly cultivated hay and the deep connection to the land that sustains us are gifts and knowledge handed down through generations. Yet, these landscapes we call home are increasingly targeted for industrial renewable energy facilities, and with them come potential risks we cannot afford to ignore.

This isn't just about opposing change—it's about ensuring that any changes honor the values and well-being of our communities. The first step is education: researching the potential impacts of these facilities and weighing the risks against the rewards. If your conscience leads you to believe the risks outweigh the benefits, it's time to take a stand. And yes, taking a stand can mean different things for different people.

Opposition can be as simple as signing a petition or writing a letter to the government agency in charge of permitting. For others, it means volunteering to spread the word, joining a grassroots group, or even taking on leadership roles within these organizations. But the truth is, too few are willing to risk embarrassment or put aside their pride to publicly speak out. Each level of effort matters, but the sacrifices required to make meaningful change are often underestimated.

A wise pastor once told me, during a capital campaign for our church, that the goal wasn't equal gifts but equal sacrifice. Not everyone could contribute the same financially, but everyone had something to offer—whether it was their time, prayers, or support in other ways. The same principle applies here. It's not about who does the most but about everyone contributing what they can. God doesn't measure the size of the gift; He sees the heart behind the sacrifice.

When it comes to opposing renewable energy facilities, the sacrifice required might be time, energy, financial, or even stepping outside your comfort zone. After learning about the potential consequences these facilities could have on your community, apathy is not an option. As Jesus said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20, NIV). But while faith can move mountains, placing all that faith in one person is ill-advised. True change requires collective action, not reliance on a single individual.

Over the past four years, I've seen this play out in Hardin County, Ohio—a rural community not far from where I live. For years, I've been approached by people seeking advice on how to stop the enormous influx of large wind and solar facilities in their area. I've been honest about the hard work, long hours, and family disruptions involved in leading such efforts. I've also been transparent about the reality: even with all this effort, success isn't guaranteed. Yet too often, people were unwilling to take up the mantle themselves. They placed their faith in me to solve their problem, but no single person can carry such a burden alone. Their hesitation and inaction left their community vulnerable.

This pattern of misplaced faith extends beyond renewable energy opposition. Many are pinning their hopes on a single leader, believing that one election or one person can change everything. This reminds me of the faith some have placed in President Trump. While I respect his campaign rhetoric and his stated support for rural communities (specifically as it relates to renewable energy), I cannot ignore the lessons from his book, *The Art of the Deal.* President Trump has always been a negotiator, and negotiations often involve compromise. It's not hard to imagine a scenario where concessions to the pro-renewable energy lobby might be made in exchange for advancing other policies he deems more critical.

This is not to say we shouldn't hope for his support but to caution against relying on it entirely. History teaches us that promises made on the campaign trail often face the reality of political trade-offs. Just as the potential adverse effects of renewable energy facilities have a probability attached, so too does the likelihood of compromise in Washington. The only way to ensure our voices are heard is to amplify them through our collective efforts, not to rest our hopes on a single individual.

Now is not the time to gently lift your foot from the gas pedal. It is the time to press it to the floor. Those of you who feel hesitant to get involved, I challenge you to reconsider. Fear and pride are heavy burdens, but they pale in comparison to the weight of regret. Stand up for the principles you hold dear and the values you hope to pass on to your children. Take action now to ensure our government doesn't view our silence as consent or our opposition as negotiable.

This is also an opportunity for greater involvement in your local government. Volunteer to serve on your zoning board or even consider running for office. Local leadership is a powerful way to ensure that your voice is heard and your community's interests are protected.

Think of our opposition like tending a field. If we plant seeds but don't tend the soil, the harvest will fail. It takes effort—sometimes backbreaking effort—to ensure those seeds grow into something fruitful. The same is true for our communities. We must all contribute, in whatever ways we can, to nurture and protect what matters most.

If we unite, giving the gifts God has entrusted to us, we can make a lasting impact. Together, we can protect the health, safety, and welfare of our families and communities. Together, we can preserve our legacy and celebrate the heritage that defines us.

Let's honor the land and the people who came before us by standing firm for what we believe is right. Our future depends on it.

JW Thompson is a stubbornly determined amateur who helped lead a grassroots movement to stop a utility-scale solar project in northwest Ohio—the first ever denied by the state's regulatory board. Armed with 30+ years in civil engineering and surveying, an insatiable curiosity, and a knack for irritating his wife, JW spent countless hours researching renewable energy to support his cause. His efforts have since inspired and supported similar opposition groups across Ohio. Although confident in everything he writes, he readily admits he is human and prone to error, strongly encouraging everyone to perform their own due diligence and validate anything in his writing.

You can email JW Thompson at: renewable.concerns+TLBP@gmail.com

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(Watts Inside? from page 11B)

the signal. "There is no way of mitigating that aside from not building turbines," said Benjamin Karlson who leads the Wind Turbine Radar Interference Mitigation program at the American Sandia National Laboratories.

The mission of the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (OE) is to lead national efforts to modernize the electricity delivery system, enhance the security and reliability of America's energy infrastructure, and facilitate recovery from disruptions to the energy supply. One of the threats OE is concerned about is a high-altitude electromagnetic pulse (HEMP) from a nuclear explosion and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) or an early time (E1) pulse which can be generated by EMP weapons.

Whose responsibility is it for EMP protection? Few utilities have given much thought or effort to protecting their systems against the effects of EMP. Many electric grid owners and operators see protection from an EMP attack as a DOD responsibility.

Both wind and solar need to be installed above ground, which not only makes them susceptible to damage from natural events like hailstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.; but it also makes them susceptible to an EMP attack.

Toxins and Environmental Impacts:

There is a growing public awareness that so-called environmentally friendly energy sources like wind turbines and solar panels aren't so environmentally friendly, after all. Whether it be thousands of non-recyclable wind turbine blades arriving at landfills, or the growing recognition that solar panels contain toxic heavy metals that can pose a risk to the environment should they leak out of the panels or shed off wind turbines, the environmental costs of "renewable" energy are becoming clearer every day.

Contrary to previous assumptions, pollutants such as lead or carcinogenic cadmium can be almost completely washed out of the fragments of solar modules over a period of several months, by rainwater alone.

Tornado in 2015 broke 200,000 solar modules in S. California and in Puerto Rico which gets 40% of its power from solar, they lost a majority of their panels during Hurricane Maria.

Stanford Magazine also points out that solar energy has a higher carbon footprint than wind and nuclear energy. Ray Weiss, a professor of Geochemistry at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, explains that a number of solar panels release nitrogen trifluoride (NF3), a chemical compound 17,000 times worse for the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

Beyond the clear misallocation of resources and energy market price distortions, there is a further environmental problem associated with solar panels and wind turbines.

According to cancer biologist David H. Nguyen, PhD, toxic chemicals in solar panels include cadmium telluride, copper indium selenide, cadmium gallium (di)selenide, copper indium gallium (di)selenide, hexafluoroethane, lead, and polyvinyl fluoride. Silicon tetrachloride, a byproduct of producing crystalline silicon, is also highly toxic.

Like a headline from the Babylon Bee, due to the toxins in renewable energy products, if Robert Kennedy Jr. were to be appointed to the Department of Energy instead of the Department of Health and Human Services, solar panels and wind turbines and lithium batteries would be banned and dismantled across the U.S. When you factor in the cost of reliability in providing power (the sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow), as well as decommissioning costs and environmental cost from superfund chemicals on solar panels and wind turbines that leach off equipment and into the soil and water, the numbers behind 'free sun and wind" don't look so clean and cheap any longer.

Retiring Worn-Out Wind Turbines Could Cost Billions that Nobody Has

When the federal subsidies go away, many of the wind turbine companies will go with them. You will not be paid for the lease and will be responsible for disposing of their equipment which contains PFAS which are essentially

(continued on page 15B)

Gone With the Wind

Wind Turbine Sales Pitch on Spin Cycle

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By Saundra Traywick

Today I would like to share my research on PFAS and Wind Turbines contamination risks that I believe warrants not only a moratorium on wind turbines, but **a complete ban and overhaul of the entire program until further research by unbiased sources has been conducted.**

Yesterday I emailed my commissioners the EPA's new "PFAS strategic roadmap" document as well as a video of the last Ground Water Management meeting where we shared our concerns about BPA, Microplastics, and potential PFAS contamination of the Equus Beds from leading edge erosion of wind turbine blades.

At the time, I was more concerned about the research on BPA's in the resin shed from wind turbines, hydraulic fluid, concrete, drilling, and vibration issues disturbing the aquifer, but I recently discovered the following information in a Pub Med research publication.

"**In the energy sector, PFAS are known to be employed** in solar collectors and photovoltaic cells, and in lithium-ion, vanadium redox, and zinc batteries. In addition, **fluoropolymers are also used to coat the blades of wind mills.**

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7784712/

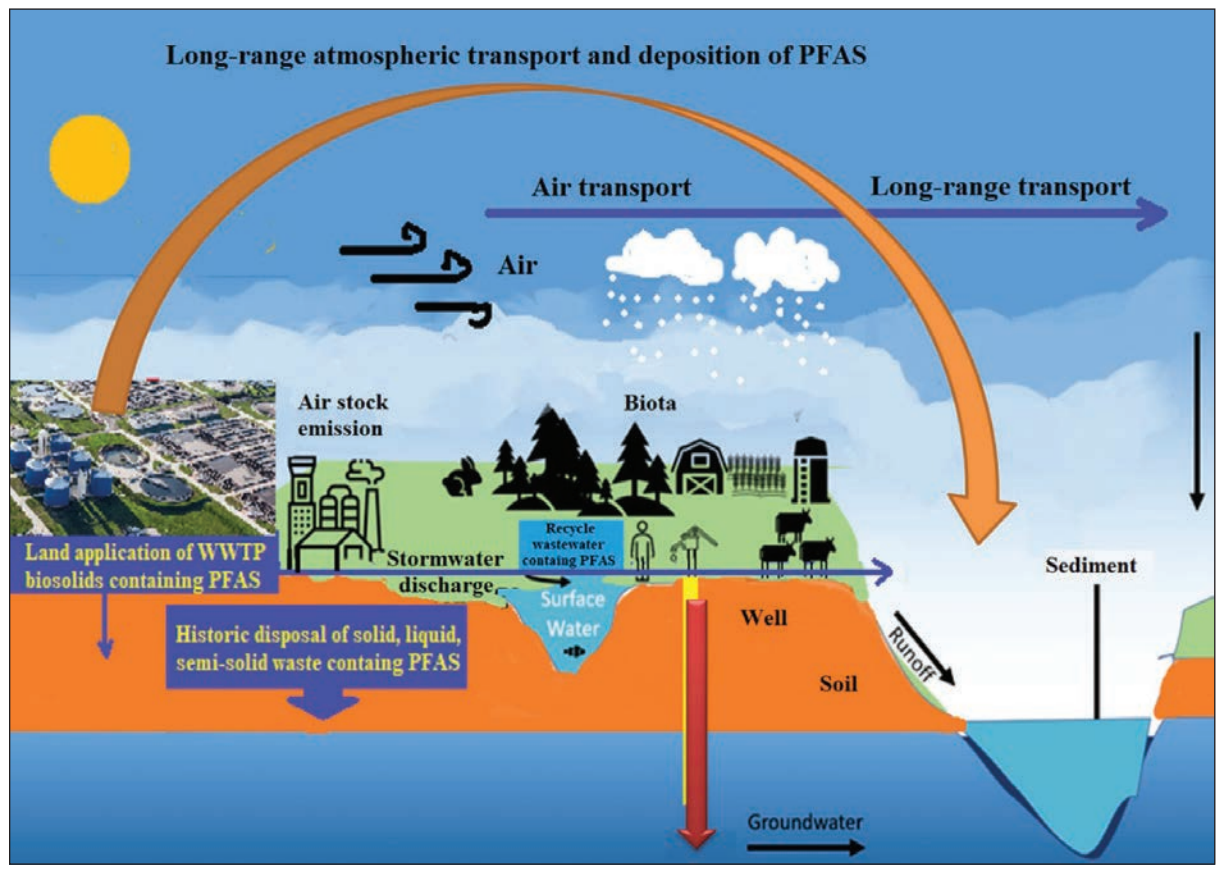
In further research I found that this is a bragging point, that the protective COATING is key, and is continually upgraded as it degrades. Remember, according to research, the COATING of the wind blades is the part containing PFAS.

(This document also stated that PFAS are in Hydraulic Fluid. Please refer to the active wind turbines in Oklahoma currently leaking hydraulic fluid etc. down the sides.)

The research stated that this is patented information. That means the exact percentage of PFAS used in the coating of Wind turbines is unknown, due to company patents, and they don't have to tell you about their usage.

The question is, are we willing to risk the water supply (not to mention the air quality) for half a million people based on an unknown company secret?

The EPA has not yet determined an acceptable enforceable amount of PFAS for water. Yet.



This photo shows some of the KNOWN ways that PFAS enters the environment and the air and water. Apparently, they haven't added the data from studies showing wind turbine blades coated with PFAS…due to the patent protections.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969721060812

This diagram shows that PFAS "occurrence far from the potential sources suggests that long-range atmospheric transport is an important pathway of PFAS distribution."

Individual states are already implementing contaminant levels.

Vermont Water Supply Rule was adopted to establish a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) as well as routine public drinking water monitoring frequencies for PFAS. **The MCL is 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L) and it is for five PFAS in drinking water:** PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid), PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonic acid), PFHxS (perfluorohexane sulfonic acid), PFHpA (perfluoroheptanoic acid), PFNA (perfluorononanoic acid). The sum of these five PFAS cannot exceed 20 ng/L.

1 nanogram per liter (ng/L) is equal to 1 part per trillion (ppt).

Research from the Turbine Group showed that the blades of a 4.2MW turbine could emit 62 kilos of material annually. This was ridiculed by the developer of the Viking Energy wind farm, which base its own calculation of 150 grams per turbine per year on a data sheet provided by manufacturer Vestas and made available through the Norwegian wind energy association NORWEA. https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2021/12/22/row-over-microplastics-from-wind-turbines-rumbles-on/

Based on the photos of wind turbine blade erosion and the eye witness accounts of farmers who hate the turbines due to the chunks of fiberglass they throw all over their fields, I would personally trust the research of the Turbine Group, however, in order to be fair to the wind developer, lets assume that they're right and each turbine only emits 150 grams per year.

PFAS are called Forever Chemicals for good reason, they last FOREVER. Farmers in Maine, Michigan, Illinois, New Mexico, and around the world are discovering the error of trusting in the government's assurances that free biosludge was safe. Now their farms are ruined, contaminated with PFAS and "only fit for wind turbines or solar."

The funny thing about PFAS is that it is bioaccumulative. It disperses in water, air, and soil, and is taken up into our plants (including wheat and corn etc.), and then ends up in our deer, beef, milk, and our own blood, causing a myriad of health issues.

And it last for around 4,000 years.

If we assume the 150 grams shed per turbine per year is correct, like the developer has stated, and assume this patented formula only contains 50% PFAS contaminants, that would mean only 75 grams of PFAS FOREVER CHEMICALS are shed from each wind turbine over our aquifers, into our land, and into the air we breathe, per turbine. Per year.

Let's go back to the Vermont standards for maximum contamination of water.

1 nanogram per liter (ng/L) is equal to 1 part per trillion (ppt).

A Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) is 20 nanograms per liter (ng/L).

That means 1 gram of contaminated PFAS wind turbine blade material contains 1,000,000,000 nanograms. (That's one TRILLION nanograms.)

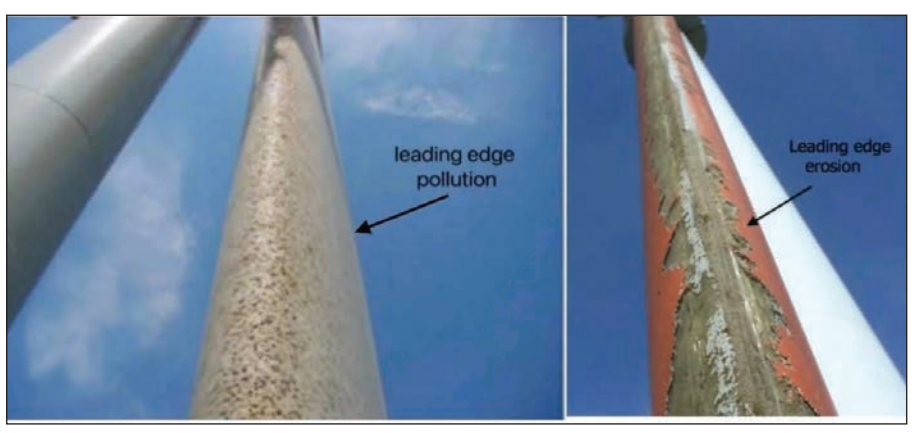
So 75 grams of PFAS would equal 75 TRILLION nanograms.

And 75 TRILLION nanograms is enough to contaminate…a whole lot of water.

And it NEVER goes away. That means every single year, each turbine would be shedding, conservatively, 75 trillion nanograms of PFAS into the soil, water, and air around them, and accumulating each year.

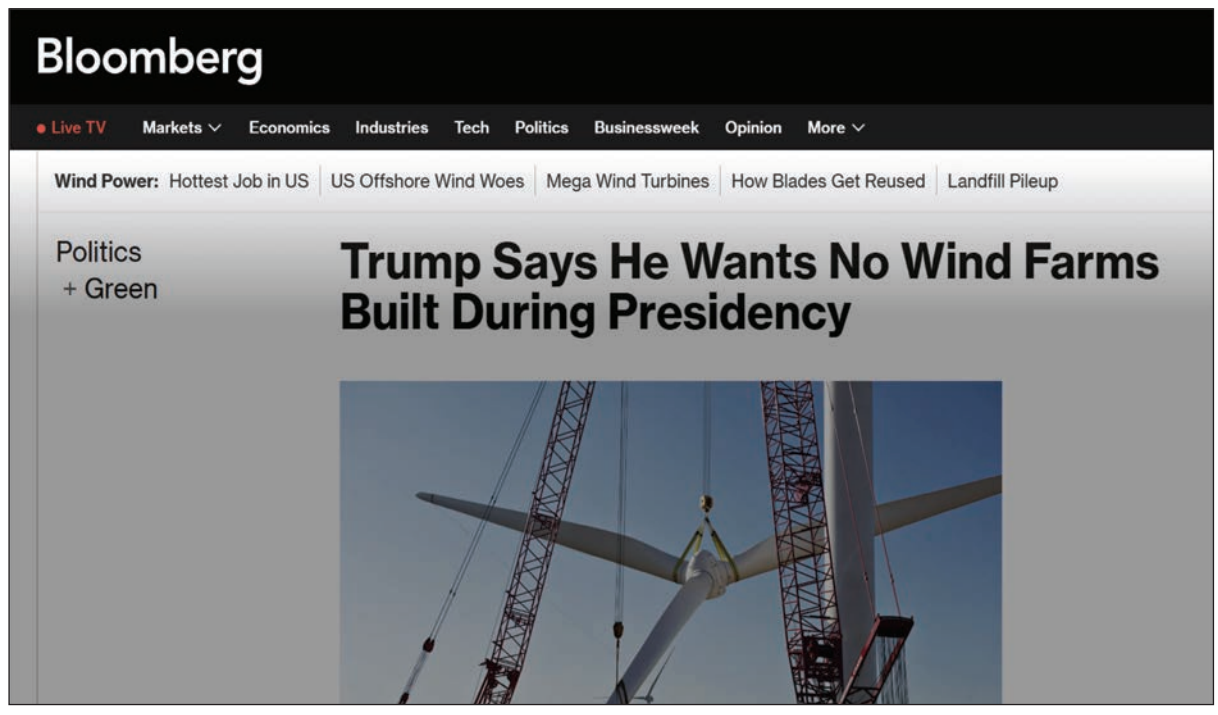
Whether we go with the figure from the actual research group stating that wind turbines

(continued on page 15B)



Getting Wind of the Dark Side of Wind Turbines

Eufaula Indian Journal
By JERRY FINK MANAGING EDITOR



Can cash-strapped McIntosh County fight the trillion- dollar corporations who are planning to put at least at 120 windmills in the Lenna and Hanna areas of McIntosh County.

These windmills are real – wind turbines said to create clean energy for Oklahoma's future, energy that will be shipped to other states.

Or will they destroy the county's future by ultimately polluting Lake Eufaula, the source of the county's wealth, as many think?

Some opponents say the blades are coated with a "forever chemical" (PFAS) that is toxic and can-do irreversible damage. PFAS are a class of thousands of substances that are widely used in industrial and domestic applications. They have been dubbed 'forever chemicals'.

However, the American Chemistry Council says Fluoro Technology (comprised of PFAS) is essential to modern life and is an important enabling technology for society.

"Fluorinated chemicals, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), are a large and diverse family of chemistry that makes possible the products that power our lives — the cellphones, tablets and telecommunications we use every day to connect with our friends and family; the aircrafts that power the U.S. military; alternative energy sources; and medical devices that help keep us healthy. PFAS are vital to enabling our lives in the 21st century," says the council.

The European Chemical Agency recommends restricting the use of PFAS in applications, including in wind turbines. According to the ACC the wind industry is already using PFAS-free coatings for the rotor blades. And it continuously assesses whether other components and materials may contain PFAS and, if so, whether PFAS-free alternatives are available.

The wind industry acknowledges that in certain use cases downstream industries may need time to develop performant substitute materials, according to the council.

According to Trans-Altas Corporation, based in Canada, the company has lease agreements with more than 25 landowners totaling 22,000 acres.

Opponents of the wind farm project remain skeptical about the use of PFAS, saying chemicals given off by the turbines ultimately end up in the ground water which pollutes that water and eventually migrates to the lake.

They claim the turbines affect the health of humans, livestock, wildlife and the environment, not only by the PFAs but constant shaking of the turbines and drying out the soil beneath them, making it barren.

On Nov. 22, 2024 100 or so protestors attended a community meeting in Hanna. Monday, Nov. 28, 2024 about 50 crammed into the county commissioner's meeting room at their weekly meeting to express their concern. Another was scheduled with the McIntosh County commissioners at their Monday session, Nov. 4, 2024 when Assistant District Attorney Greg Stidham was scheduled to be there and a request by the concerned citizens for a moratorium for three to five years was requested – better yet would be a permanent moratorium.

District 3 Loyal (Dean) Taylor said Stidham told the commissioners it was doubtful that a moratorium by the commissioners would stand up in court.

Fighting a court battle will get expensive, and the wind farm corporation has a lot more money with which to do battle.

"It could break us," Taylor said. "It's going to cause the county to go broke with lawsuits."

Tim Stacy, who farms and ranches near the wind farm site, was one of the organizers of the protest. He said protesters aren't demanding much, just to postpone the construction until a better study can be conducted.

"We're going to get into a lawsuit any way we go," Stacy said.

Among those at the meeting were Dist. 15 State Representative Tim Turner and District 1 County Commissioners Clifford McElany, District 2 Commissioner-elect Clifford Mcelhaney and District 3 Commissioner Bobby Ziegler (chairman of the board).

Also, Robert Asay who manages a 1,000acre hunting ranch near the proposed wind farm location.

Asay represents ranch owner Bob Rosene, who made his fortune in the oil and gas industry.

"He's opposed to the wind farm," Asay said.

He fears pollution will harm the deer, turkey, ducks and other wildlife that live on the ranch. "We didn't hear about this until just a few days ago," Asay said. "We're just now getting wind of it."

Most of the people who have attended the meetings claim the wind farm company has kept everyone in the dark, being secretive about filing necessary documents, including identifying the locations and the size and scope of the wind turbines.

But representatives of the company say they have notified everyone they are required to notify, including property owners, OCC, FAA and county commissioners.

The commissioners say the way they were notified was in such a way that they didn't see any imminent danger.

Zeigler said he was led to believe construction was a couple of years away.

However, Holdenville attorney John Baca, who created a moratorium for wind farms in Hughes County, said according to the documents filed by the company they can start construction 60 days after they file notice. Filing took place Sept. 9, 2024.

Apparently, the FAA is the only agency which exercises authority over the project because of the height of the 120 towers. The height issue is to protect life flights safely as they cross the area.

The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality says it has no authority.

Neither does the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

"They're putting these things on the tops of ridges and between the North and South Canadian Rivers and the water will all go down to the lake," Asay said. He said more people need to become aware of the issue. "We need to stop them from putting it in, and the only way to stop them is to not let them start," he said.

The anti-wind farm movement grows. Some people want the project stopped completely. Others say they want a moratorium for three to five years so that the pros and cons can be thoroughly investigated by non-partisan professionals who can issue a definitive answer to serious questions before the corporations can turn their first spade of dirt, which could mean that it is too late to stop it.

Folks are being enticed by the corporation with a financial windfall – claiming they will donate millions to local schools, provide income and tax revenue. Baca says the corporations lie. Stacy says they won't hire local people or local contractors. "So if (the company) gets sued they can take the case to federal court, not county court," he said.

His property sits on top of an aquifer which supplies water to a lot of people in the area. If pollution gets into the aquifer, hundreds of people will be without water.

Stacy said if something isn't done quickly, "It's going to get ugly."

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead, expose them. —*Ephesians 5:11*

(Watts Inside? from page 12B)

chemical compounds that contain Fluorine (the 'F' in PFAS).

Many confuse Fluorine which is a chemical element, with fluoride which is the negatively charged ion of that element, meaning when a fluorine atom gains an electron, it becomes a fluoride ion; essentially, fluoride is the ionic form of fluorine. Both are toxic (see skull and crossbones and word "TOXIC" on the bags of Fluoride our water departments dump into our water). Good thing for Wind Turbine companies Bobby Kennedy Jr. is headed to the Health and Human Services Department instead of the Energy Department or solar and wind energy products could have been banned by him.

The EPA's PFAS Superfund designation is a rule that classifies perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) as hazardous substances. This designation is part of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as Superfund.
Why the designation was made: the EPA made this designation to protect public health and the environment from the potential harm of PFAS.

The EPA believes that no level of exposure to PFOA and PFOS is safe!

The wind turbine manufacturers know this. They promise you all this money from leases, knowing full well, they might not be in business when the time comes to decommission their turbines. The turbines are installed on your land which then makes it the landowner's responsibility to dispose of them, or perhaps the taxpayers when the local county has to get involved.

This whole process has the potential to bankrupt the landowner and place an enormous unfunded liability on the counties where the turbines are installed.

American Experiment has been warning the public about the short useable lifetimes of industrial wind turbines for some time now, but one thing we haven't really touched on yet is who pays to decommission the turbines once they're no longer useable?

The first step in fixing the issue of solar and wind manufacturers going bankrupt before their products are decommissioned and they have to incur those costs, is to institute an

upfront fee on solar panel purchases to make sure that the cost of safely removing, recycling or storing wind turbine and solar panel waste is internalized into the price of the products and not externalized onto future taxpayers.

An obvious solution would be to impose a new fee on solar panels that would go into a federal disposal and decommissioning fund. The funds would then, in the future, be dispensed to state and local governments to pay for the decommissioning of wind turbines and solar panel waste. The advantage of this fund over extended producer responsibility is that it would insure that products are safely decommissioned, recycled, or stored over the long-term, even after wind and/or solar manufacturers go bankrupt.

Dangers of Lithium-Ion Batteries (LIBs) Fires:

According to Steve Kerber, vice president and executive director of Underwriters Laboratory's (UL) Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI), the number of lithium-ion battery-based fires is growing with enormous frequency both in the United States and internationally.

In all of these fires caused by LIBs, it is not a slow burn; there's not a small amount of fire, it literally explodes," FDNY Commissioner Laura Kavanagh told reporters. "It's a tremendous volume of fire as soon as it happens, and it's very difficult to extinguish and so it's particularly dangerous."

Due to the lack of wind and sun consistency, energy storage (i.e. Lithium-Ion batteries) need to be considered in the equation. The news has reported on electric vehicles lithium battery fires that local fire departments have an increasingly difficult time putting out. Lithium-ion batteries are used in solar installations to store energy, in electric vehicles, mobile phones and more. Lithium battery fires are very dangerous. Water may not prevent this type of battery from burning and spreading. Battery cells are known to explode and quickly spread to another battery or other devices.

These batteries may continue to generate heat even when there is no visible sign of fire. Lithium-Ion batteries are known to unexpectedly re-ignite (without warning) minutes, hours and even days after all visible fire has been put out and fire extinguishers do not work on lithium-ion batteries fires.

Decommissioned batteries are also dangerous because the toxins used to create them can leach into the soil and water.

Bankruptcies:

According to recent reports, while a significant number of solar companies, particularly smaller installers, have gone bankrupt in recent years, the exact percentage of all solar and wind manufacturers experiencing bankruptcy is difficult to pinpoint due to the diverse nature of the industry, but estimates suggest it is not a majority; however, some sources indicate that over 100 US residential solar companies collapsed in 2023 alone, representing a substantial portion of the market. Then 2024 brought additional immense challenges, with higher interest rates, tighter financing, and adverse policy shifts in key states contributing to over 100 more solar bankruptcies based on industry data.

California was particularly hard hit due to new net metering rules under NEM 3.0 that radically reduced system economics. These adverse state policy impacts exacerbated financing shifts, triggering plummeting demand and an 80% decrease in rooftop solar installation volume. The California Solar & Storage Association reports that the fallout includes thousands of stalled projects, over 17,000 industry layoffs, and a wave of high-profile bankruptcies. The outright collapse of many once fast-growing solar firms provides a sobering case study on the potential unintended consequences of incentive transitions.

Mounting financial losses in the wind industry over the last few months are taking a toll on the Biden administration's clean energy drive. Despite the billions in subsidies that came down the pipeline in 2022 before the Inflation Reduction gave away even more money.

Since the Obama administration, the federal government has been pouring billions into projects to meet environmental goals, only to have the companies go bankrupt.

In 2009, the Obama administration co-signed $535 million in loans to solar panel manufacturing startup Solyndra. Two years later, the company went bankrupt, laying off 1,100 workers.

Another solar manufacturing startup, Abound Solar, received $400 million in federal government-backed loans to expand its Colorado and Indiana facilities. The company received further support from the U.S. Export-Import Bank, as well as property tax rebates in Colorado and Indiana.

In June 2012, the company filed for bankruptcy and left 405 people unemployed. It also left Colorado to spend millions to clean up hazardous waste it left behind.

Fisker Automotive received a $529 million green-energy loan from the Department of Energy for its luxury hybrid vehicles. The company spent $192 million of the loan before it was suspended in 2011 after the company failed to meet several sales milestones. Fisker filed for bankruptcy in 2013.

Now you know why trillions of dollars later, taxpayers aren't any better off.

(Gone With the Wind from page 13B)

shed only 150 grams of wind turbine coating material KNOWN TO CONTAIN PFAS according to the research, or whether we go with the research from the Norway group stating the actual number is closer to 62 kilos per year….

It's bad.

And in my humble opinion, you'd be a fool to allow these anywhere NEAR your property, your community, your water, or your state.

Unless, of course, you like the idea of the EPA knocking on your door in a few years holding you accountable for PFAS contamination of the soil, air, water, and health of an entire community.

Because, according to the EPA, underserved rural communities are the ones who will be facing the most contamination.

By ommitting (whether intentionally or unintentionally) this critical information from their wind turbine sales pitch, they have put our State, our water, our health, and the very air we breathe at grave risk.

In conclusion, I'd like to leave you with a quote from the Water Management Board when we attended their meeting last week to share our concerns.

"Maybe if groups like ours had been around when they were drilling for oil and gas, we wouldn't have the issues with water contamination that we do now."

P.S. Please have this research confirmed by a qualified unbiased environmental expert and correct as needed. I'm just a mom of two immune compromised kids, on a mission to protect them and every other child from suffering the same fate.

Sincerely,
Saundra Traywick
(405) 706-8622
Dulcededonke@gmail.com

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THE MT GOP WORKS FOR YOU!

I believe in the following GOP Principles:

1. Montana should have closed primaries.
2. Elections should be transparent and fair.
3. The MT GOP and Republican Organizations across the state should let the voter determine the primary winner and no endorsements or funding should be made by Republican organizations during primaries.
4. The MT GOP should be transparent with its members by sharing where we spend our money-whether on candidates, issues or events, etc.
5. Your leadership should be accountable to YOU, our members and we need to keep you informed and inspired.
6. Our members, especially elected officials, need to support the MT GOP Platform and all Republicans should be held accountable.
7. Republicans should see the value of their contributions to the MT GOP through strategic investments that pay off political dividends for the Grassroots of the Montana Republican Party. Seven is a Biblical number-enough said.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Candidate for
MTGOP Chairman

TANNER SMITH

Tanner Smith is Running for MT GOP Chair

Tanner Smith, the Montana Republican Party's National Committeeman, declared at the Great Falls Pachyderm, on Friday, December 6, 2024, that he was running for state GOP chair in the party's upcoming reorganization election in June.

The state Republicans' incumbent chair, Don Kaldschmidt, announced he will not seek re-election.

"Montana Republicans can rest assured, that if I am elected as the MT GOP Chair, the principles and values they hold so dearly will always have a committed fighter to back them up, day in and day out," Tanner said in a statement to The Liberty Bell (TLB).

Tanner is putting Democrats on notice now — as chair, he promises any challenge made to tear down traditional families, harm our children and further erode our freedoms, would be met by decisive action from the MT GOP.

"We can longer play defense and cede ground to the left. The MT GOP not only has to regain lost ground, we need to look within and operate with transparency. Under my leadership, we will give a clear accounting to all central committees on how our funds are distributed-to which candidates, for which races and for how much," Tanner promised.

"This party cannot be run solely by top donors at the expense of our families, farmers, ranchers and small business Republicans," he added.

"The Republican Party prides itself on being the 'Big Tent' party and welcoming in of all who adhere to our platform. We need to ensure all who enter our tent truly believe in and will defend our platform. That means if you are an elected official, your votes must uphold our U.S. Constitution and party platform," Tanner added.

Tanner explains, "For good governance, I am asking that our party refrain from using derogatory labels to define each other. It causes animosity and distracts from where the real debate needs to be focused, and it detracts from the cooperation we need to maintain within our own ranks."

He believes, all Republicans have solid contributions they can and should be making to the MT GOP and to each other and the party should allow for those contributions to be made for the benefit of all Republicans.

He brings up how George Washington warned Americans against being controlled by our passions and forming permanent alliances. Tanner truly believes no one person is always bad or wrong or always good or right.

In reference to the debacle at the state Senate level, Tanner believes, "Each Republican should be following the lead of our leadership and I do believe in accountability and in rebuking those that sway away from our core values which includes respect for leadership-that is a biblical

principle. My question to those nine senators, 'Is it worth the damage you caused to our party by taking the actions you did to accomplish your personal goals rather than the party's as a whole?" If your answer is yes, then perhaps you need to reconsider the party you call home, because that is not how Republicans should operate-period."

"We hear about leadership all the time, and the easiest response to something we don't like is to rebel like a bucking horse, but neither the cowboy nor the horse is better off because of it," Tanner advises. He continues by surmising, "The MT GOP needs strong leadership that will harness the power of our frustrations and energy and focus them on the strategies that will advance our cause, not cause our party problems through internal strife." His goal is to coalesce Republican by putting their focus and energy towards productive uses that benefit the party as a whole, not just factions of it.

"All of us want to see the lives of our fellow Montanans improved, even the democrats, Tanner tells TLB. "Our differences lie in how to achieve those goals," he adds. Tanner understands life's not fair, and life is short. United though, he sees the positive difference his leadership can make within the party. "We are dealt certain cards and we need to make the best of them, and that starts with a fundamental need within our party to trust each other and the mission and leadership of our party," Tanner shares. "That starts with discipline and focus on our party not each other; and by understanding how to work together to make advances towards our shared goals instead of focusing on our differences and attacking each other," he adds.

Tanner understands, "At the heart of being a Republican is to be honest with our voters, our fellow Republicans and ourselves." He wants to avoid the discord at the state level of the GOP seen in so many other states. "Our focus should be on serving the grassroots of our state, not ourselves or solely those we align ourselves most closely to," he adds. "The GOP is based on a family of values we call our platform, and we should stick together like that family because that is what ultimately will make us strong," emphasizes Tanner.

When asked by TLB why he was running for MT GOP Chair, so soon after being elected MT National Committeeman, Tanner responded, "I had high hopes the National Committeeman position would afford me the opportunity to be a voice for the conservative cause and be able to enact common sense changes at the national level of the Republican Party. I soon discovered, state level delegates have no real impact at the national level-we are simply asked to rubber-stamp what the RNC has determined will be pursued."

Tanner proceeded to tell how he met many great delegates from other states who echoed his concerns and were just as disillusioned. After reflecting heavily on where he could add the most value and make the most difference, especially to each MT GOP Convention delegate who supported him with their vote to make him their National Committeeman; he realized he had to run for MT GO Chair.

"My decision to run is based on putting Montana families first including my own. I cannot stand idly by and watch my children struggle in a future I didn't attempt to improve for them and their children," Tanner shared with TLB.

After conferring with his family and making sure they were onboard, Tanner realized that in order to make a difference on the national level, Montana needs to make a difference on the state level by being an example to be emulated by other states. "When the states are on the right path, their course of action will be reflected on the national level. It is a bottom-up strategy. I realized top down doesn't work," expressed Tanner.

When asked how he would find the time to accomplish the fundraising needed in this unpaid position, Tanner's response was he was willing to make the sacrifice and "There is a lot of money available from donors who support the 'Rosendale' type of governance, that has been ignored under the current MT GOP leadership and he believes "frankly that divided us."

While in Washington D.C. representing Montana, Tanner told TLB the sentiment was reiterated by several other states. "Republicans have been told so long they don't have the numbers, the support etc., they are often afraid to take the action needed to make monumental impact. Biblically, we start with faith and God rewards that," adds Tanner.

Tanner believes, "Our party is diverse and needs to stay united in a way where everyone can contribute and feel valued for their contributions instead of being attacked or having our core principles undermined. That is partially addressed through accountability, which is achieved through transparency, and further achieved by putting up stellar candidates all of us can be proud to support."

Tanner stressed it has never been more apparent that the time is now to elect leaders willing to roll up their sleeves, bring people together, and fight for the future of Montana, in the trenches alongside their fellow Montanans and he looks forward to earning your vote as MT GOP Chair.