





# Raised in a Boxcar, Guided by the Creator

## Charles Walking Child's Inspiring Journey to the U.S. Senate

By Anna Marie White

In a world drowning in political noise and empty promises, Charles Walking Child stands out like a beacon of quiet strength. Meet him once, and you'll feel it—a calm wisdom, an unshakeable presence, like an old soul who's weathered life's fiercest storms without letting them define him. But to truly know Charles, you must step back into his beginnings: a humble boxcar on the rugged outskirts of Great Falls, Montana.

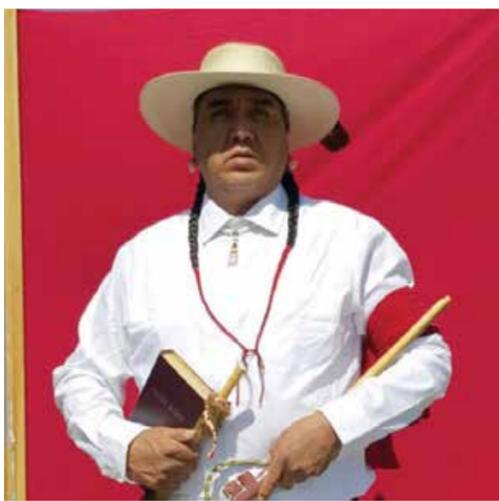
### A Childhood Forged in Resilience and Love

Imagine a childhood without the comforts we take for granted—no running water, no central heat, just the raw bite of Montana winters in a railcar his grandfather dragged home and transformed into a shelter. It wasn't easy. Snow piled high, winds howled through the cracks, and luxury was a word from another world. Yet, in that simple space, Charles learned life's most profound lessons from his mother and grandparents: preparation, hard work, and unyielding dignity.

They lived like the wise ant in the fable, stockpiling wood and provisions long before the first flake fell. "We prepared for the storms," Charles recalls, his voice steady with the memory. There was no bitterness in their hardship—only family, love, and a deep respect for the land that sustained them. His father was absent, a quiet ache that Charles carries not as a grudge, but as a call to action. "Fatherlessness is a silent epidemic in America," he says. "We must heal it for our children's sake." Raised with values that echo through generations, Charles emerged not broken, but unbreakable—a testament to the power of love in the face of adversity.

### Faith as a Lifelong Compass

For Charles, faith isn't a Sunday ritual; it's the heartbeat of every moment. He speaks of the Creator not with fanfare, but with intimate reverence, praying constantly to stay connected, not out of fear, but gratitude. "If you want to know what God is telling you, listen to your heart—but be careful to interpret it correctly," he advises, drawing from a well of personal conviction.



He honors the name of Jesus and finds profound strength in **Psalm 91**—a passage he calls "the strongest promise in the Bible." This timeless scripture speaks of dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, finding refuge and fortress in God amid every danger. Charles believes too many chase religion instead of a real relationship with the Creator, or substitute politics for true spiritual guidance—and that this disconnect breaks God's heart. In a divided nation, his faith offers a unifying force: a reminder that we're all guided by the same divine spark. It's this spiritual depth that fuels his every step, turning personal trials into a mission of hope.

### Honoring Indigenous Roots and Timeless Values

With Anishaabe-Ojibwe, Blackfeet, and Cree, blood coursing through his veins, Charles embodies the resilience of Native peoples who've faced betrayal, displacement, and loss—yet held fast to honor, humility, and community. Though not raised on tribal lands, he was steeped in their wisdom: respect for elders, responsibility to the earth, and the sacred bond of family.

He sees the government's historical wrongs—broken treaties, stolen lands—as a stark warning for today. "When power forgets the people," he says, "everyone suffers." Charles's heritage isn't just history; it's a blueprint for a better America,



where dignity prevails over division.

### Cleaning House: A Vision for a Freer Montana

Charles lives by a simple truth: "When your house is clean, you feel good." It's more than housekeeping—it's a metaphor for the soul, the home, and the nation. America, he believes, is cluttered with debt, taxes, and distractions that weigh down families, stifle dreams, and erode freedom. Montanans yearn to live unburdened—to own land, build legacies, and thrive without chains.

**Trump's recent statements on taking a harder line against Mexican cartels echo what Charles Walking Child was already warning about years earlier. In 2023, Walking Child argued that any serious clean-up effort must include what he called a "War on Drugs," insisting that extreme sanctions and direct pressure on Mexico were necessary to confront the fentanyl crisis.**

He said he had personally witnessed more than 100 people in his community lose their lives to the drug.

"It's non-discriminatory," Walking Child said at the time. "We need to launch our biggest campaign against the Mexican government and unite as Americans."

As national leaders now revisit strategies for confronting cartel-driven fentanyl trafficking, Walking Child's earlier warnings and calls for unity take on renewed relevance.

His concerns hit home:

- **Debt as bondage:** Trapping young people in cycles of loans and credit.
- **Crushing taxes:** Forcing elders from their hard-earned homes—Charles calls for exemptions to protect them.
- **Corporate overreach:** Prioritizing profits over people, while families shrink and farms fade.
- **Lost land:** Regulations and costs stealing the birthright of future generations.

"We must return to a God-centered, family-centered life," he urges. "Let Montanans live free, not enslaved."

### A Calling, Not Ambition

Charles Walking Child recently filed to run for the U.S. Senate from Montana—not as a politician chasing power, but as a man answering a deeper summons. He describes the decision as spiritual rather than political. When asked why he chose to step forward at the federal level instead of starting with a local office, his response is direct and heartfelt: "This is my calling."

He readily acknowledges the many dedicated, good-hearted people already serving at local and state levels. But he sees the federal government as having drifted dangerously far from the people it claims to represent—now dominated by wealth, entrenched power, and voices that no longer grasp the daily realities of ordinary Montanans. Charles refuses to stand on the sidelines. He believes true leaders serve humbly, living among the people rather than above them. "A Senator should walk with Montanans," he says, "not talk down to them."

### A Heart for Veterans and the Wounds We Cannot See

Charles believes wars are spiritual battles as much as physical ones. He believes evil can enter the minds of soldiers in traumatic moments, and that

(continued on page 3A)

## Faith. Family. Freedom.

## Farmer. Rancher. Neighbor.

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# HINEBAUGH

HOUSE DISTRICT 36

## Miles City, Montana

## — Custer County





# Conservatives of Montana Senate District 9

## Choose Limited Government Over Two Decades of Spending Growth – Vote Zack Wirth

By Mark Hanson Wolf Creek

**P**rimary Election Day is June 2, 2026. Early in-person voting begins May 6. In the Republican primary for State Senate District 9, voters have a clear choice between a principled conservative with a proven record of fiscal restraint and a longtime legislator who has controlled the appropriations process for years.

Rep. Zack Wirth of Wolf Creek is a rancher and lifelong Montanan committed to reducing government overreach, protecting taxpayers, and upholding rural values. His voting record shows consistent support for limited government and spending discipline.

Here are the key facts on why Zack Wirth is the stronger choice:

**Strong alignment with Republican principles.** Zack Wirth holds a 94% rating on the Legislator Loyalty Index (LegiStat) for voting in line with core Republican values. He has aligned with the Montana Freedom Caucus in opposing excessive budget growth and has voted against major spending increases, including the 2025 HB 2 General Appropriations Act that raised the biennial budget by 6% to \$16.6 billion. His positions prioritize fiscal restraint and keeping government within its means.

**Focus on genuine property tax relief.** Wirth supports straightforward tax cuts that put money back in the pockets of Montana families, seniors, farmers, and small businesses. He has advocated for reforms that deliver real relief without shifting burdens onto property owners.



Zack Wirth

**Endorsed by Americans for Prosperity-Montana.** AFP-Montana has endorsed Zack Wirth for his commitment to limiting government growth, advancing economic freedom, and promoting policies that deliver long-term prosperity for Montana families.

In contrast, Rep. Llew Jones of Conrad has served in the Montana Legislature since 2005—more than two decades—by switching between the House and Senate to circumvent the term limits Montana voters approved in 1992. As Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, he has directed the state's budget process, overseeing significant spending increases and controversial measures such as HB 231 in

2025. That bill drew sharp criticism from the Montana Republican Party, which labeled its promoters the “Nasty Nine” for what it called a “terrible and unnecessary property tax shift” that raised taxes on seniors, family cabins, businesses, and agricultural land despite a \$2 billion surplus. Other Republican legislators have even filed a lawsuit alleging the process misled the public and altered the original intent of property tax relief legislation.

Zack Wirth offers a fresh, principled alternative rooted in faith, family, honesty, and common sense. He fights for accountability, protects Montana's land and rural communities, and puts taxpayers first instead of expanding government programs.

***District 9 voters—this primary is your opportunity to support a legislator whose record matches the conservative principles of limited government, lower taxes, and fiscal responsibility.***

**Vote Zack Wirth for Montana State Senate on June 2.** Early voting is open now through May 30. Your vote will help send strong, principled leadership to Helena.

Montanans, if you want government to stay out of your wallet, you need to show up and vote on June 2 for Zack Wirth. Our state's future depends on leaders who deliver real fiscal responsibility, protect hardworking families, and respect the will of the people. Zack Wirth has earned our trust — he's worth it. Let's make it happen on June 2. 🗳️

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# How Local Leaders Can Stop Government Abuse

## Why Conservatives Must Get Involved Locally to Stop Federal Overreach

By Eric Olsen

In an age of growing federal intrusion into our daily lives, our families, and our God-given freedoms, an old but powerful idea offers a clear path forward for conservatives: the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates. This biblical and historical principle calls on local officials — county commissioners, school board members, sheriffs, and mayors — to stand between tyrannical higher authorities and the people they serve. When Washington or state capitals pass laws that violate God’s eternal law, natural rights, or the Constitution, lesser magistrates have a sacred duty to refuse enforcement, protect their communities, and defy the injustice.

Far from chaos, this doctrine restores true order by holding every level of government accountable to a higher standard. Conservatives who are tired of watching federal mandates erode parental rights, religious liberty, and economic freedom need to hear this loud and clear: **your involvement at the local level is not optional — it is essential.**

The doctrine traces its roots to the Reformation. In 1550, Protestant leaders in Magdeburg, Germany, issued the Magdeburg Confession, refusing Emperor Charles V’s orders to crush religious freedom. Scottish reformer John Knox built on it, declaring that lower officials must shield the innocent from ungodly commands. Scripture itself provides the foundation: the Hebrew midwives defied Pharaoh’s order to kill baby boys (Exodus 1:15-21), and Daniel’s friends refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol (Daniel 3). The core truth is simple — all human authority comes from God and must obey His commands. When it does not, interposition is not rebellion; it is obedience.

This principle is as American as the Declaration of Independence. Our Founders interposed against King George III’s tyranny. Northern officials during the Fugitive Slave Act era refused to return escaped slaves, placing moral law above unjust federal power. Just two years ago, Texas Governor Greg Abbott deployed state resources to secure the southern border against federal inaction — a modern example of a lesser magistrate stepping up.

Yet today, too many local conservatives sit on the sidelines while federal overreach rolls in. The crisis is clear: most local officials — especially on school boards and county commissions — are woefully uneducated about this doctrine and even the U.S. Constitution itself. Surveys show widespread civic illiteracy; many cannot name the three branches of government or basic First Amendment rights. Local leaders routinely defer to Washington on education, health, and regulations, assuming “higher” authority always wins.

Compounding the problem is the influence of legal advisors who urge blind obedience to secular law, even when it clashes with biblical commands on life, family, and liberty. Many local officials are either atheists or nominal Christians shaped by weak, government-fearing pastors who preach unconditional submission (ignoring the full context of Romans 13). These pastors often closed churches during the COVID mandates out of fear of losing tax status, modeling cowardice instead of courage. The result is a generation of officials who view government — not God — as the final authority.

The consequences are devastating and hit conservative communities hardest. When local leaders fail to interpose, one-size-fits-all federal policies destroy parental authority through curricula promoting critical race theory and transgender ideology — ideas that directly contradict God’s design for humanity. County commissioners who rubber-stamp burdensome regulations crush small businesses, drive up energy and food costs, and hurt working families. Crime rises, families fracture, and faith communities weaken. Submission to centralized tyranny is not neutral — it is actively ruining our society.

**Conservatives, this is your wake-up call to get involved.**

Reversing the tide requires deliberate action right where you live:

- 1. Educate yourself and your local officials.** Host community seminars, study Matthew Trewhella’s book *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates*, and dive into biblical teachings on interposition. Churches must lead workshops on the Constitution and this doctrine, so believers understand their duty.
- 2. Run for office or elect faithful Christians.**

Vet candidates rigorously for genuine faith. Reject atheists and nominal believers. Support bold pastors who preach truth instead of compliance. Conservatives must stop ceding school boards, county commissions, and sheriff’s offices to those who will not stand. If you cannot physically volunteer for a campaign, consider donating financially to a candidate-not the state party-but to the candidate directly.

- 3. Hold legal advisors accountable.** Demand counsel rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics and push back against groups that use courts to erase religious expressions or
- (continued on page 16A)

## The John Birch Society



### The Harsh Reality of a “Convention of States”

Tuesday, April 21, 2026  
Doors open at 6pm.  
Billings (14 N. 48th Street)  
Church of Christ

Robert Brown shows what Mark Meckler of Convention of States (COS) says about an Article V convention, thoroughly debunks his false statements by examining the historical evidence, and offers a \$10,000 challenge to Meckler and COS. Brown concludes examining what a convention would look like if it were held today.

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

Free-but donations gladly accepted.

### ATTORNEY GENERALS (from page 1A)

“Reference Manual of Scientific Evidence,” which is meant to be a “primary reference source for federal judges on questions of science in litigation.” The academies worked with the Federal Judicial Center on the report.

“After state attorneys general raised these concerns, the FJC removed the chapter from its online version of the Manual. State attorneys general have raised these concerns with NASEM as well, but NASEM has not taken action, nor has NSF publicly called for a retraction or attempted to address violations of its grant restrictions,” the letter says.

The letter also calls for barring future federal grants to NASEM, a private nonprofit organization with a congressional charter that frequently works with government agencies.

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen led the letter, joined by attorneys general from Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The AGs sent the letter to War Secretary Pete Hegseth, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, and Energy Secretary Chris Wright.

The letter says that NASEM President Marcia McNutt informed the Montana attorney general’s office that the “manual, including the chapter on climate science, will continue to be available on the Academy’s website.”

The letter notes the Transportation Department provided \$84 million in contracts or grants to the academies; the Energy Department provided \$7 million; and the War Department provided \$33 million in federal tax dollar payments.



Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen (Michael Ciaglo/Getty Images)

The attorneys general referenced National Science Foundation grantee guidelines and argued the involvement of the environmental group in the manual for judges represented a conflict of interest, as the activists had testified in environmental litigation.

“NSF grantees must ‘uphold the highest standards for scientific integrity,’ such as ‘transparency’ and ‘protection from inappropriate influence,’” the letter says. “NSF’s grant recipients also must avoid or disclose any ‘significant financial interest’ that ‘could directly and significantly affect the design, conduct, or reporting of NSF-funded research or educational activities.’”

On Thursday, The Washington Free Beacon reported on newly obtained public records that show the Environmental Law Institute’s Climate Judiciary Project conducting “Judicial Leaders in Climate Science” seminars at multi-day conferences with all expenses paid, luxury accommodations in Napa Valley and Palm Beach.

Last August, Knudsen asked the Environmental Protection Agency to cancel taxpayer grants to

the Climate Judiciary Project, which has funded the climate advocacy training for about 2,000 judges across the country. The EPA terminated the grants.

NASEM acknowledged receiving an inquiry from The Daily Signal for this story but did not respond by publication time.

A spokesman with the National Science Foundation declined to comment.

The Environmental Law Institute also did not respond to phone and email inquiries for this story by publication time. However, a spokesman for the group, Nick Collins, told the Free Beacon that the organization seeks to ensure judges can “competently evaluate the evidence presented by all parties.”

Collins added, “[Climate Judiciary Project] does not advise judges on how they should rule on any issue or in any case. In every case, it is up to the judge to consider the specific evidence presented by the parties and make particularized rulings grounded in the factual record before them.”



# Taxation is Ruination — and a Warning for Montana

By Tracy Sharpe

**T**axation is supposed to be about revenue — not ruination. The overhaul of Montana’s tax system by the 69th Legislature threatens the foundation of our communities and could force Montanans to abandon their properties to the ultra-rich.

Though advertised as relief, these reforms create an unstable, unpredictable landscape: property taxes drop for select homeowners, but increase sharply for small businesses, landlords, and anyone excluded from narrow eligibility brackets. Through tax policy, the state government isn’t merely raising revenue to fund its obligations; it is picking winners and losers.

I have constituents, now retired and past their best earning years, who have spent their lives in Montana and are now unexpectedly facing taxes so steep (78%, 90% and 100% increases) they must consider abandoning their Montana dream to sell to those for whom the increase is pocket change. All of this is attributable to the greedy hand of government. The people might lose, but the government never goes without.

Some inherited tiny lake-front properties (shacks in some cases) that have been in the family for generations. Others have elderly parents they are carrying for in the house next door and thus, on paper, have two residences. Others have the retirement home they planned to live out the rest of their years in that they bought and paid for long ago, but it unexpectedly jumped in value in recent years. These citizens are not seeing reasonable tax increases they can manage; they’re instead being driven out of their homes by their own government.

Conrad Republican Rep. Llew Jones was the architect of the massive property tax shift passed in the Legislature and signed by Gov. Gianforte. “Every part of this bill has been vetted,” Jones confidently stated in the Senate Bill 542 conference committee on April 29. Rep. Jones along with a handful of others published their bipartisan “mission accomplished” editorial on May 8, proudly asserting that they had “answered the call” to provide “real, permanent property tax relief.”



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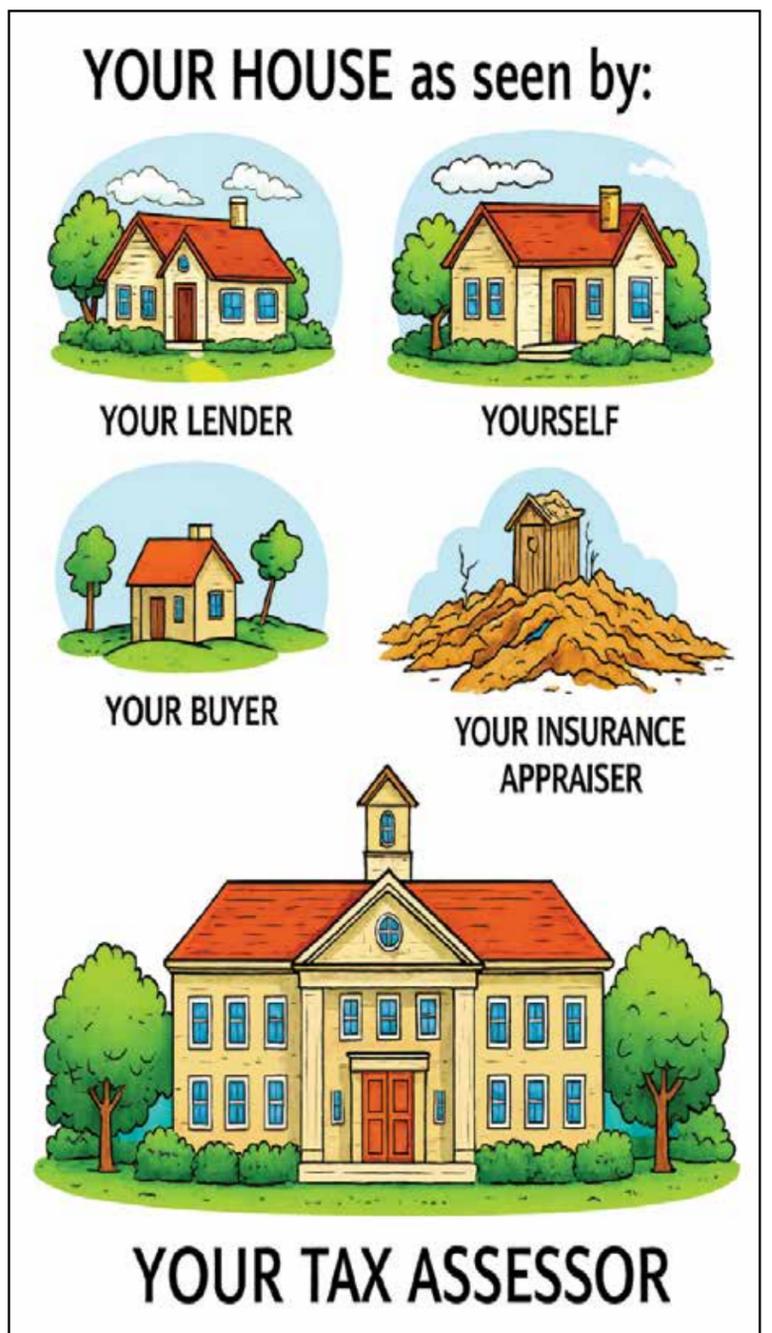
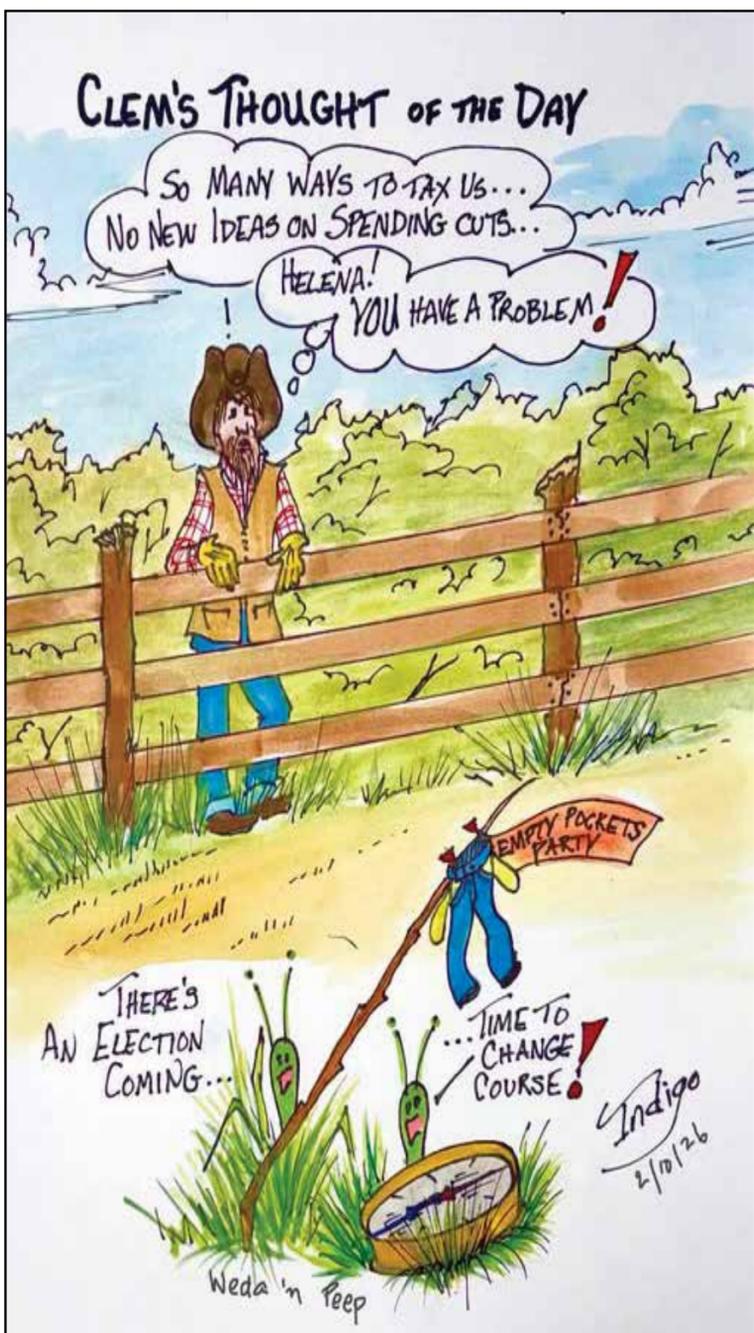
They specifically highlighted that Senate Bill 542 and House Bill 231 will lower property taxes paid by 130,000 renters. Then the mills were determined and the actual property tax bills arrived. Even supportive legislators and media were alarmed. “Montana renters could foot the bill for a property tax blunder” blared the Missoulian headline. Turns out, rent is going way up instead of down in Missoula and other cities because of this legislation. Apartment buildings are staring down 40% or higher property tax increases and landlords will pass this on in the form of higher rent.

Promised relief for renters turned into a new burden, and many experts warn the pain won’t subside even if rates dip next year. Billings Democratic Sen. Emma Kerr-Carpenter and Missoula landlord Nate Tollefson state that rents are not going to go back down even if the property taxes do.

Even Democrat legislator Rep. Mark Thane stated that we’re now into a “year of pain” for renters. And what does pain look like? It’s a rent payment that has increased so much due to taxation that you do not have the money to pay it. Then what?

One solution is to call for a special session to fix this disaster. Let those who did get a tax break keep it, but return all the others including those with two homes to the same tax they had last year. The difference in revenue would then come out of the hide of the state government. Yes, that would mean many pet project programs to include some I favor would not be funded. So be it.

When it comes to the people or the government, the people must always come out on top. Then, perhaps, we could entertain a much wider spectrum of possible tax solutions in the 2027 session. What is not an acceptable outcome is to drive Montanans out of their homes through errant and destructive tax policy. Shame on the state government and Legislature for putting its wants above the needs of the citizens it is supposed to serve and represent. For Montana to thrive, tax policy must offer stability, prioritize community over government expansion, and guarantee that it’s always the people who come first. That’s a mission that has not been accomplished. 🇺🇸





**PROPERTY TAX SHAM (from page 1A)**

just not as much as they would have without the change.

**Lawmakers who backed the overhaul now face scrutiny**

The property tax package was drafted, amended, or supported by several key lawmakers, including Sen. Llew Jones, Rep. George Nikolakakos, Rep. Melissa Nikolakakos, and Rep. Lyn Bennett, all of whom voted for the restructuring. They framed the bill as a way to “rebalance” the tax system and protect primary homeowners.

But Stene’s local data, combined with broader economic research, suggests the law may instead:

- Increase the risk of mortgage distress and foreclosure
- Make it harder for first-time buyers to qualify for loans
- Undercut small “mom-and-pop” landlords
- Push elderly homeowners on fixed incomes closer to housing insecurity
- Raise long-term housing costs across the state

These concerns echo themes raised by national housing economists and multiple research institutions. Federal Reserve research shows that property tax spikes are one of the fastest ways to push financially fragile homeowners into foreclosure, especially when increases are sudden and unpredictable. AARP and senior-housing advocates warn that rising property taxes force many seniors out of homes they intended to age in, particularly those living on fixed incomes.

**Registration requirement creates a costly trap**

Under the new law, homeowners must be properly classified as a primary residence or long-term rental to qualify for the lower “homestead” tax rates. Those who fail to register by the deadline are automatically taxed at the higher non-homestead rate—about 1.9% in Stene’s Yellowstone County examples.

Stene warns that a property normally taxed at 0.76% can jump to 1.9% simply because paperwork was not filed.

The problem is even worse for buyers. If someone purchases a home that is currently classified in a higher tax bracket—such as a second home or short-term rental—they may be stuck with that higher rate until the next assessment period, even if they immediately move in and use it as their primary residence. Depending on timing, that can mean up to 18 months of paying the higher rate before the classification catches up.

Lenders underwrite based on the current tax status, not what the buyer hopes it will be later. That can:

- Blow up a pre-approval
- Force a lower purchase price
- Leave the buyer paying hundreds more per month in escrow

**Tiered rates create sharp divides**

Beginning this year, Montana properties fall into sharply tiered categories:

**Primary residences and long-term rentals (homesteads)**

- About 0.76% for assessed values up to roughly \$378,000
- About 0.90% for \$378,001–\$756,000
- About 1.10% for \$756,001–\$1,511,999
- About 1.90% above \$1.512 million

**Other residential property**

- About 1.90% flat for second homes, short-term rentals, and vacant lots

**Commercial and industrial**

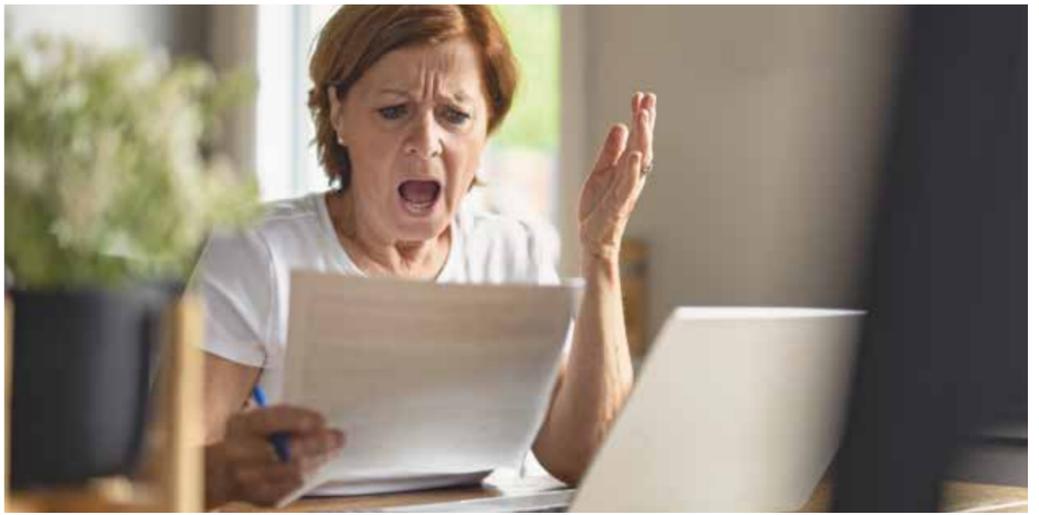
- Around 1.50% under \$2.274 million
- Around 1.90% above that

These brackets create significant differences between otherwise similar properties. A home assessed at \$377,900 remains in the lowest bracket, while a home assessed at \$378,100 moves into the higher tier.

**Vacant lots hit hardest**

Vacant residential lots show some of the steepest increases under the new system. Stene’s Yellowstone County examples include multiple cases of tax bills doubling or more:

- A lot in Middle Valley rose from \$513 in 2025 to \$1,280 in 2026, a 150% increase
- A Cherry Island lot increased from \$487 to \$986, up 102%
- Several others show increases between 55% and 120%



For families who bought land intending to build later, the higher carrying cost can derail long-term plans.

**Rental properties face significant jumps**

Small multi-family rentals—duplexes, triplexes, and four-plexes—also show substantial increases. A duplex on Avenue F, assessed at \$239,500, saw its tax rise from \$1,586 to \$2,206, with a default rate of \$3,666 if not registered correctly.

Properties assessed above \$378,000 move into higher brackets, with increases of 28% to 34% in many cases.

**Why the law hits the elderly and small landlords especially hard**

The new tax structure disproportionately harms two groups who have historically relied on stable property taxes to stay afloat: elderly homeowners on fixed incomes and small “mom-and-pop” landlords.

For seniors living on Social Security or modest retirement income, even a few hundred dollars in unexpected tax increases can destabilize a carefully balanced budget. Many older Montanans own their homes outright but have limited cash flow; rising taxes can force them to cut essentials, take on debt, or consider selling the home they intended to age in.

Small landlords face a different but equally damaging pressure. These owners—often teachers, nurses, tradespeople, and retirees—rely on one or two modest rentals as a way to supplement income, build equity, and create long-term financial security.

**Researchers at the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies report that small “mom-and-pop” landlords provide most of the naturally affordable housing in the United States.**

**Harvard’s analysis shows that when operating costs — including property taxes — rise faster than rents, small landlords are the first to exit the market.**

**The Center warns that when small landlords sell, their properties are often acquired by larger investors who raise rents and reduce affordability.**

Housing economists widely agree that losing small landlords shrinks the entry-level rental market and eliminates a key path to building wealth for working families.

**Impact on home sales and the American Dream**

Stene warns that the new tax structure may affect property values, particularly when identical homes fall into different tax categories. In one scenario he presented, a buyer comparing two \$400,000 homes—one taxed at about 0.90% and the other at about 1.90%—would face a monthly payment difference large enough to require a \$41,000 price reduction to compensate.

**According to Zillow’s housing affordability analysts, when property taxes rise faster than wages, starter-home buyers are priced out first because higher escrow payments reduce what they can qualify for.**

**Real-estate economists note that tax-driven affordability shocks reduce mobility, slow sales, and depress local markets — effects that hit rural and low-income areas hardest.**

Economists caution that when ownership becomes unattainable, property tax shocks undermine the basic mechanics of a capitalist housing market by reducing entry-level ownership and concentrating property in fewer hands.

**The broader economic warning**

Across all major research institutions — Zillow, Harvard, the Urban Institute, AARP, and the Federal Reserve — the findings are consistent:

**Property tax spikes are one of the fastest ways to:**

- Push financially fragile homeowners into foreclosure
- Drive starter-home buyers out of the market
- Force seniors out of homes they intended to age in
- Eliminate small landlords, raising rents
- Reduce affordable housing stock
- Increase wealth inequality
- Undermine the capitalist housing market by making ownership unattainable

**By voting for this overhaul, lawmakers didn’t just create a tax system that accelerates foreclosures, drives out first-time buyers, forces seniors from their homes, and destabilizes the very housing market Montana families depend on — they detonated a financial trap under the people they were elected to protect, fully aware of exactly who would pay the price and for how many years the damage would echo.**



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# INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: THE \$7 BILLION SHELL GAME

## How Montana's Corporate Welfare Built Empty Rooms While Parents and Teachers Paid the Price

By Jerry O'Neill

HELENA — An investigation into the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and state campaign finance records reveals a systemic diversion of federal funds intended to fix a crumbling childcare workforce. While the administration claims to be solving a “capacity crisis,” the data exposes a method of one-time infrastructure payouts and corporate welfare that benefits wealthy tech firms and hospital conglomerates, while the general public and the actual workforce are left to foot the bill.

**Clarification:** The “\$7 billion” figure refers to the total biennial budget of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), not solely childcare funding.

Childcare funding represents only a fraction of the department's total budget authority.

### Capitalism 101: Why You Can't Find a Teacher

There is a reason Montana's childcare system is failing, and it isn't just a “lack of slots”—it is a failure to respect basic capitalist market competition. In the industry, these professionals are officially classified as Early Childhood Teachers (ECT) and Lead Teachers, yet they are being paid as if they are unskilled labor.

According to the 2024 Montana Department of Labor and Industry wage data, the median wage for these teachers is roughly \$12.73 per hour. Meanwhile, entry-level jobs at local Town Pump gas stations or McDonald's frequently start at \$15.00 to \$18.00 per hour. As a result, Montana is seeing a mass exodus; according to the 2024 Montana Department of Labor and Industry workforce report, 56% of childcare job openings are created by people “changing occupations”—leaving the field entirely for

higher-paying work.

### The “Empty Room” in Big Timber

Defenders of this strategy argue that expanding slots is “drastically needed” and “ultra-important.” They point to rural areas like Big Timber, where Big Timber Daycare LLC received a grant to create 15 new slots at a public cost of \$25,585 per child.

While the town certainly needs care, this investment is a shell game. If the state pays \$383,788 for an “infrastructure” expansion but refuses to ensure competitive market wages for the staff, the result is an expensive, taxpayer-funded empty room. The state has focused on the “egg” (the building) while the “chicken” (the teacher) has already left for a better-paying job at a convenience store. Without teachers to fill them, these “slots” do not actually exist.

### The Corporate Welfare Capture

The most egregious aspect of this \$7 billion shell game is the \$2 million Family Forward Montana grant program. Administered by Zero to Five Montana, these grants are corporate welfare.

Family Forward Montana is funded by the state's federal Bright Futures B-5 grant and administered by Zero to Five Montana. According to the 2024 Employer-Sponsored Grant Program description published by familyforwardmt.org, this is a \$2 million grant program funded by the state's federal Bright Futures B-5 grant and administered by Zero to Five Montana.

**Exclusive Access:** Taxpayer dollars were awarded to private firms like AdvicePay, Inc. (Bozeman) and Echo Church (Helena) to create on-site care.

**The Public Shut Out:** Unlike community daycares, these subsidized “slots” are restricted to the employees of the specific companies receiving the grants. The general public cannot use these daycares, meaning the taxpayer is funding a private employee benefit for corporate workers.

**Subsidizing Private Equity:** This effectively uses federal welfare dollars to subsidize the overhead of private-equity-backed firms like Foundant Technologies, while the average Montana parent remains on a two-year waitlist.

### The Legislative Enablers: Voting for Corporations, Not People

This diversion of funds is protected by a specific group of Republicans who frequently side with Democrats to prioritize corporate-heavy spending and slush funds over workforce stability. These lawmakers are the primary beneficiaries of the Montana Hospital Association (MHA) PAC, which funneled \$75,000 into primary races to protect them from conservative reform.

(continued on page 15A)

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# Stop the \$16.6 Billion Betrayal

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As a lifelong resident of House District 4, I am writing to alert my neighbors to a fiscal crisis in Helena that is being masked by “conservative” rhetoric. While **Representative Lyn Bennett** claims to represent our values, her voting record tells a different story: she has become a key vote for the most bloated budget in Montana's history.

To most of us, \$16.6 billion is just a number. But let's look at what that means for your family. **According to the Montana Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD)**, the 2025 biennium budget reached a staggering **\$16.6 billion**. This breaks down to approximately **\$14,561 for every man, woman, and child** in the state over two years.

To see how extreme this is, look at the spending per person in other states compared to Montana:

- **Total State Spending per Capita:** While Montana spends **\$14,561**, data from the **Urban Institute and NASBO** shows the national average for state spending is roughly **\$8,500** per person. Even “high-tax” states like **Illinois** (\$8,100) and **California** (\$10,319) spend significantly less per resident than we do here in Montana. Meanwhile, **New York** spends roughly **\$11,500** per person, and **Wyoming** spends about **\$9,300**.

- **DPHHS Spending per Capita:** Our Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) alone now consumes **\$7.022 billion**—roughly 44% of our entire state budget. This means we spend over **\$6,100 per person** just on this one agency. In contrast, **U.S. Census Bureau and NASBO figures** indicate that **Wyoming** manages its equivalent health and welfare services for roughly **\$3,588 per capita**, **Illinois** for **\$2,755**, and even **New York**—despite its massive programs—averages approximately **\$4,942 per resident** for those specific services.

We are told this bloat is because Montana is a “large state,” but the truth is our government has become a massive machine that, **according to LFD and national staffing data**, employs **26 state workers for every 1,000 residents**—far above the national average of 17.

Despite this “horribly big” spending, the outcomes for Montana families are tragic. **According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS)**, Montana has become the “child removal capital” of America, taking children away from their parents at a rate **300% higher than the national average** (16.8 per 1,000 children in Montana vs. 5.8 nationally).

We have to ask where the money is going. **According to the IRS Exempt Organization Business Master File**, Montana has over **8,500**

**non-profits**, trailing only **Delaware (10,757)**, **Rhode Island (7,170)**, **Vermont (6,300)**, and **Wyoming (6,173)** in per-capita density. In Montana, these NGOs have become a shadow government, siphoning off grants while the “causes” they claim to serve only get worse.

Instead of fixing these systems, Rep. Bennett voted to funnel our tax dollars into a “shell game” of corporate welfare. While local parents sit on two-year waitlists, **DPHHS grant records** show millions in “Innovation Grants” went to NGOs like **Zero to Five Montana** to subsidize private childcare for wealthy, venture-backed firms like **Foundant Technologies**. We are literally using taxpayer dollars to build “empty rooms” for corporations while our own early childhood teachers are paid less than gas station clerks.

On **June 2, 2026**, we have a clear choice. We can continue to fund a \$16.6 billion bureaucracy that treats families as statistics, or we can demand accountability. **Don't vote for “Big Government” Bennett.** Vote for the true fiscal conservative fighting for families—**vote for Shaun Pandina.**

Sincerely,

Russell Sias Columbia Falls, Montana 🇺🇸



# Montana Republicans Deserve Real Primaries — Not Pre-Arranged Succession

By Lisa Bennett

In the span of just a few days, two major federal races in Montana were reshaped in ways that have left many grassroots Republican voters asking a pointed and increasingly urgent question: were the outcomes decided before the public even knew there was a race?

The first development came when Ryan Zinke announced he would not seek reelection to Montana's western congressional seat. His decision created an immediate opening in one of the state's most significant federal positions. Almost as quickly, Zinke endorsed conservative radio host Aaron Flint as his preferred successor.

Flint entered the race with remarkable speed, backed by an already organized campaign and a growing list of endorsements. However, questions soon emerged among grassroots activists regarding the timeline of events leading up to his candidacy. Public records show that Flint changed his voter registration to Flathead County on October 22, 2025—months before Zinke's retirement was made public. For many Republican voters, that detail has raised concerns about whether the transition had been planned well in advance, out of public view.

Compounding those concerns, Donald Trump also issued an endorsement of Flint within minutes of his entry into the race, reinforcing the perception among some activists that key decisions may have been coordinated ahead of public announcements.

Before those concerns could settle, a second and even more dramatic development unfolded in Montana's U.S. Senate race.

On the final day of candidate filing, an unusual and highly strategic sequence of events took place. At 4:52 p.m.—just minutes before the 5:00 p.m. deadline—former U.S. Attorney Kurt Alme filed to run for the Senate seat currently held by Steve Daines. Shortly before the filing window closed, Daines withdrew from the race entirely.

Within minutes, the Republican field was effectively sealed. When the deadline passed,

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As voters consider the race for House District 9 in the Montana Legislature, I hope they will take a hard look at Jim Riley.

Some point out that Jim is not a Native Montanan. But none of us get to choose where we are born. What we *do* get to choose is where we plant our flag, build a life, and serve a community. Jim Riley chose Montana—and he lives the values this state is known for every single day.

Jim's priorities are simple and in the right order: faith, family, fitness, giving back to the community, and then business. That kind of foundation produces the kind of leadership Montana needs—steady, disciplined, and grounded.

I've always believed you can judge a man by the boots on his feet and the gloves in his truck. Those two things will tell you more about the true measure of a man than any campaign brochure ever could. Jim Riley is exactly that kind of man—a hard worker, a problem solver, and an authentic straight shooter who neither takes nor dishes out any BS.

In my experience, Jim will outwork everyone else in the room. He has the common sense, grit, and perseverance that Montanans respect.

Frankly, Montana needs more Jim Rileys.

That's why I'm supporting Jim Riley for House District 6, and I encourage others who value hard work, honesty, and real Montana values to do the same.

Sincerely,  
Rod Kuntz

Author, The W.A.R.P.A.T.H. Alliance  
Kalispell, MT



Alme stood as the only Republican candidate. Daines promptly endorsed him as his successor.

Compounding the perception of coordination, Donald Trump issued an endorsement of Alme within minutes of his filing, a move that further intensified concerns among grassroots voters that the outcome had been carefully orchestrated in advance.

The result was unmistakable: grassroots Republicans were left without a competitive primary in a race that would typically draw significant interest and participation. Even critics outside the party described the maneuver as an effort to shape the field before voters had a chance to engage.

These rapid developments have also placed scrutiny on the leadership of the Montana Republican Party, particularly Chairman Art Wittich and party official Debbie Churchill. Their roles in these events—whether active or absent—have become a central point of concern.

Two possibilities now confront party observers. The first is that party leadership was aware of these strategic moves in advance but did not inform grassroots voters. If true, such a scenario would represent a serious breach of

trust between party leadership and the activists who form its foundation.

The second possibility is that party leadership was unaware of the timing and coordination of these decisions, suggesting that key races are being shaped by a small group of powerful figures operating independently of the state party apparatus. Many observers find this explanation more plausible, especially in light of a recent Montana GOP mailer promoting a fundraiser for Daines and Zinke that appeared to have been prepared before their withdrawals were publicly announced.

If party leadership was indeed unaware, the implications are equally troubling. It would suggest that the official state party structure is not directing the political process in Montana, but rather reacting to decisions made elsewhere. In that case, grassroots Republicans are left to ask what role, if any, the party leadership truly serves.

At the center of these concerns is a broader perception that a small circle of influential figures—including Daines, Greg Gianforte, and Zinke—now exerts outsized control over Republican politics in the state. Each

(continued on page 12A)

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**COLSTRIP POWER HEIST (from page 1A)**  
took a different path.

They withdrew the PSC’s protest at FERC, claiming the filing contained “errors,” but they refused to identify what those errors were. Molnar and Pinocci repeatedly asked for clarification. None was provided.

The withdrawal left Montana ratepayers without institutional representation in the federal proceeding—at the exact moment NorthWestern was finalizing a 21-month contract to sell all 370 MW to Mercuria Energy, locking the power into wholesale markets instead of Montana homes.

**A Convenient Alignment With the Governor’s Priorities**

For years, Governor Greg Gianforte has made it a priority to recruit large-scale data centers to Montana, promoting the state as a destination for high-energy-use technology companies. That economic strategy is well known. But the timing of NorthWestern Energy’s Colstrip maneuver—and the regulatory decisions surrounding it—raise questions that many Montanans are now asking.

NorthWestern acquired the 370-megawatt Puget share for free, then moved it into an unregulated affiliate where the power could be sold on the open market. The 21-month Mercuria contract aligns neatly with the timeline of anticipated data-center development in the state. And the PSC majority—three commissioners widely viewed as politically aligned with the Governor—voted to withdraw the Commission’s protest, clearing the path for the unregulated sale of that power.

There is no evidence of coordination between the Governor’s office and NorthWestern Energy. But the outcome is undeniably convenient: a block of nearly free Montana power, removed from ratepayer control, positioned perfectly for a large new industrial customer.

Molnar and Pinocci, who have often disagreed with attorney Monica Tranel on other issues, independently reached the same conclusion she did: the structure of the transaction overwhelmingly benefits a future data center, not Montana families. Their filings show that they recognized the pattern early and attempted to stop it, only to be overruled by the PSC majority.

The coincidence is striking.  
The beneficiaries are clear.  
And the people left paying the bill are Montana’s everyday ratepayers.

**A Pattern That Hurts the Republican Brand**

This episode also highlights a deeper political tension inside the Republican Party — one that many conservatives across the country have been talking about for years.

When maneuvers like this occur, it is often the Republican Party as a whole that takes the blame. To many voters, it looks like the GOP is siding with large corporations over working families. But what is frequently overlooked is that these decisions are not being driven by grassroots conservatives. They are being driven by the establishment wing — the faction sometimes jokingly referred to by activists as “RPG Republicans: Republicans for Personal Gain.”

**In this case, the divide is unmistakable:**

- Grassroots conservatives — Molnar and Pinocci — fought to protect ratepayers.
- The establishment-aligned majority — Welborn, Fielder, and Bukacek — cleared the path for a corporate-friendly outcome.

Molnar and Pinocci’s actions show that not all Republicans operate the same way. Their filings, their persistence, and their willingness to challenge their own Commission demonstrate that true conservative principles — transparency, accountability, and protecting working families — still exist inside the party.

But episodes like this are exactly what damage the GOP’s reputation. They reinforce the perception that the party is controlled by insiders who prioritize corporate interests over the people they were elected to serve.

**Tranel’s Filing: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle**

Attorney Monica Tranel filed an emergency motion in the PSC’s merger docket that expanded and reinforced the concerns Molnar and Pinocci had already raised.

Her filing states: **“NorthWestern’s proposal... is a shell game designed to serve AI data centers over everyday Montanans.”**

Tranel documented that NorthWestern acquired the 370-megawatt Puget share for free, then chose not to place that power into regulated rate base where it could lower bills for existing customers. Instead, the company moved the asset into an unregulated affiliate, beyond the direct reach of the PSC.

Tranel shows the process is being slanted heavily in favor of NorthWestern Energy and Black Hills without an evidentiary base. It puts the 370 megawatts asset in the hands of NorthWestern Energy and the sale of that 370 megawatts becomes an asset of Black Hills when the merger of Black Hills and NorthWestern Energy goes through. Because Black Hills covers other regions, the power over the 370 Megawatts will be taken out of the Montana PSC hands once the merger happens because it will no longer be just a Montana asset. The unfettered merger of Black Hills and NorthWestern Energy is because the coming together of them will allow them to control energy in favor of more profitable data center contracts. Montana PSC Commissioner Molnar is concerned that “The entire merger is based on the desire to serve data centers at a higher rate of return than the general public, Montana residential ratepayer. If NorthWestern gets away with this they will have the most profitable contract for energy for data centers.”

She further noted that the 21-month Mercuria contract aligns with anticipated large-load development, including data centers. Internal planning materials, she explained, show that the recent Colstrip acquisitions were executed specifically to support large-load customers, even if those customers are described only in confidential terms. In that context, the PSC majority’s withdrawal did not simply tidy up a docket—it left the public unprotected.

Tranel also underscored the imbalance facing Montana ratepayers. On one hand, they are being asked to shoulder roughly \$256 million in remaining costs for NorthWestern’s regulated 222-megawatt Avista share of Colstrip. On the other, an unregulated affiliate has acquired 370 megawatts for free and is free to market that power. The result, she argues, is that Montana customers are being positioned to

subsidize corporate expansion and data-center development while losing access to some of the cheapest power available in the state.

Her analysis complemented and strengthened the warnings already raised by Molnar and Pinocci. These three working independently, are the only ones working to protect Montana ratepayers.

**Why It Matters**

If the 370 megawatts are treated as a regulated, rate based resource, Montana families stand to benefit from some of the lowest cost electricity in the country. Schools and public buildings could see significant savings, reliability during extreme cold snaps would improve, and the state would gain a meaningful competitive edge in attracting and retaining employers.

If, instead, the 370 megawatts remain a market based asset in an unregulated affiliate, Montana households receive no direct benefit. A single large customer—most likely a data center—gets access to cheap Montana power, while existing ratepayers are left to finance new generation to meet their own needs. In that scenario, the unregulated arm of NorthWestern profits from wholesale sales, even as the regulated utility seeks higher rates from captive customers.

As Molnar and Pinocci warned in their FERC filing, “Selling everything to one large load customer would accomplish neither” affordability nor reliability.

**The Bottom Line**

Taken together, the documents outline a clear pattern:

- NorthWestern engineered a regulatory bypass.
- The PSC majority—Welborn, Fielder, and Bukacek—stepped aside at the critical moment.
- Molnar and Pinocci identified the danger early and documented it in detail.
- Tranel expanded the record, exposed the merger implications, and confirmed the data center connection.
- All three — Molnar, Pinocci, and Tranel — worked, independently but aligned, to defend Montana ratepayers.

This is not a partisan fight.

It is a question of governance, transparency, and whether Montana’s energy system will primarily serve its people—or be quietly redirected to serve a single corporate customer.

Molnar, Pinocci, and Tranel have all raised the alarm.

The unresolved question is whether Montana’s institutions—and its voters—will act before the consequences become locked in and irreversible. 🦹



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## Montana's Not for Sale. Stop the Coronation — Start the Revolution.

### ★ Vote Dr. Al Olszewski for the 1st Congressional District ★

By Shirley Bennett

In the quiet corners of Montana, from the coffee shops of the Flathead to the ranch lands of the east, a pointed and urgent question is being asked: Were our election outcomes decided before the public even knew there was a race? Recent developments in Montana's federal races have left many grassroots voters feeling as though they are witnessing a pre-arranged succession rather than an open primary. When major seats transition seamlessly from one insider-backed candidate to another in a matter of minutes, the appearance of a predetermined outcome becomes impossible to ignore.

The most glaring example of this “establishment scheme” is the sudden crowning of Aaron Flint for Montana's western congressional seat. While presented as a swift response to a retirement, public records reveal a more calculated reality: Flint changed his voter registration to Flathead County on October 22, 2025—months before the vacancy was made public. This suggests a transition planned well in advance, out of the public view. Furthermore, Flint has been accused of using his media platform to do exactly what the establishment dictated, refusing airtime to conservative voices who dared to challenge the machine.

Against this backdrop of “good old boy” lawfare

and beltway-backed maneuvers stands Dr. Al Olszewski. A true grassroots candidate, Dr. O has not been elevated by a small circle of influential figures or billionaire-backed fundraisers. Instead, he represents a “just, fair, and smart” conservative alternative for those who believe that political participation should belong to the people who knock on doors and organize local meetings, not those who cut deals in backrooms.

For those who feel the weight of the establishment is too heavy to move, we must remember that God works in mysterious ways, and history is full of upsets that the “insiders” never saw coming. In 1860, the Republican

(continued on page 15A)

## Biases – Good or Bad?

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The simple answer is yes – and no. It depends on what the bias actually is. Just remember, biases are everywhere around us. Let me offer some examples:

I like vanilla ice cream. In fact, I often say that there are only two kinds of ice cream. When it comes to ice cream flavors as far as I am concerned, there are only two: Vanilla and polluted.

Now, is this a good bias, or a bad bias? It depends on someone's point of view regarding the particular topic being discussed. If you ask me, the flavor of ice cream is a good bias, and those that disagree with me are well, just wrong. Now, I grant, others may have a different



opinion, even if they are wrong. Just ask me, I will tell you all about why my opinion is the correct one. But, it depends entirely on who is being asked the question.

My point is, we all have biases. All of us. Each and every one of us. We all are creatures of our upbringing and environment. Some of these biases turn out to have positive impacts, and some turn out to have negative impacts on our surroundings. And some are better thought out than others.

I love kids. I delight in seeing them grow and mature. It delights me to be able to help them form their own attitudes, feelings, and opinions about the life they get to live and hopefully be happy with. Teaching them to have respect

and compassion for others is paramount for society and hopefully will be for them as well. Teaching them to think for themselves is essential. Even if they form different ideas about what flavor of ice cream is the best!

I do want them to understand that there are flip sides to just about everything. This is why I am presently a candidate for my local school board.

In 1913 we passed the 17th Amendment removing the selection of Senators from State Legislatures and decided to have them elected by the general public instead. The flip side is that the states, via State Legislatures, lost their representation in Congress. Before you think through this one, ask yourself ...Would our country be in debt for well over \$38 Trillion if State Legislatures had been involved?

Teaching our future generations how to think for themselves, to be good citizens, is why I am running for the School Board in Columbia Falls. This is another of my good biases! I would appreciate your vote when election time comes around.

Russell Sias  
Candidate for Columbia Falls School District 6



## Montana Gov. Gianforte Picks Beef With The Pope, Declares “National Beef Day” On Lenten Friday To Prove Montana Catholics Answer To Helena, Not Rome

*In the guise of a Babylon Bee article- this is a satirical article based on true events. Governor Greg Gianforte really did proclaim March 20, 2025, as “Montana Meat Day” in an official state document urging everyone to eat Montana beef, pork, lamb, chicken, or other livestock products.*

By Staff Writer

HELENA, MT — In the most audacious power play since the Avignon Papacy, Governor Greg Gianforte has officially declared March 20 “Montana National Beef Day,” a bold proclamation designed to remind the Vatican that while the Pope may have infallible authority over the universal Church, he has zero jurisdiction over a Montana rancher’s smoker.

The governor’s decree—complete with flowery “WHEREAS” clauses praising meat as “pure and nutritious protein,” sustainably raised under the Big Sky, and under vicious attack by “individuals and groups who would outlaw commonsense animal husbandry practices”—conveniently falls on a Friday during Lent, when every good Catholic is supposed to be choking down a sad Filet-O-Fish like it’s penance for original sin.

Insiders say Gianforte has been nursing a grudge ever since Pope Francis called for less meat consumption to fight climate change. “The Holy Father can kiss my sustainably-raised brisket,” one source close to the governor’s office quipped. “He’s got the Swiss Guard. We’ve got the National Guard, AR-15s, and a constitutional right to barbecue whatever we want.”

Local Catholic and lifelong Montanan Hank “Steak” McTavish summed up the state’s



© Alexander Rath | Dreamstime.com

theological realignment perfectly: “Look, I love the Pope. I really do. But when the Governor says ‘eat Montana beef’ and the Pope says ‘have a tuna melt,’ I’m siding with the guy who can actually impact my property taxes. Sorry, Leo—your move is in Latin, ours is in medium-rare.”

The proclamation makes zero mention of the 1,700-year-old Catholic norm of meatless Fridays, nor the special Lenten guilt multiplier that makes skipping a ribeye feel like you personally nailed Christ to the cross. Instead, it urges every Montanan—including the 15% who are Catholic—to “support our producers by enjoying a meal with Montana beef, pork, lamb, chicken, or other livestock products.”

At a press conference, Gianforte doubled down with the confidence of a man who knows his voters prioritize Second Amendment rights

over the Third Commandment. “If the Pope has a problem with it, he can come out here and try to take my grill. We’ll settle this like real men: whoever eats the bigger tomahawk steak gets to keep the Catholics.”

The Montana Catholic Conference responded with a carefully worded statement that somehow included the phrases “pastoral disappointment,” “prudence in observance,” and “please don’t excommunicate the entire state, we’re already short on priests.”

At press time, local ranchers were selling “Papal Indulgence Brisket” with a label that reads: “One (1) Friday meat consumption = 300 days off Purgatory, signed by the Governor of Montana (way more binding than some Italian guy in a white robe).” 🇺🇸

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS (from page 1A)

at the podium to make an impact. Instead, she highlights a fundamental principle of accountability: “**The act of observation changes that which is observed**”. By simply being present at school board meetings, parents alter the behavior of administrators and board members, who behave differently when they know they are being watched. According to Boggess, a consistent presence over the course of three or four meetings is often enough to “spook” leadership into making better decisions and curbing poor behavior.

However, Boggess laments that this support has been largely absent. She has been deeply disappointed that parents are not showing up to meetings in sufficient numbers. Even among her conservative colleagues, Boggess has found that many are afraid to make the tough calls or stand up for what is ethically right. She notes that “you get to a point, that without the support of parents, you cannot go it alone and accomplish anything, so why keep fighting that battle alone”. While she acknowledges that there is strength in numbers, she observes that people who care are simply not making the effort to show up, which would otherwise go a long way in supporting the officials they elect to make necessary changes.

### A System of ‘Managed Reality’

According to Boggess, the issues plaguing Utah schools go far beyond simple policy disagreements. She alleges a systemic effort to “deprogram” children, starting as early as kindergarten. Children are taught to reject reality and social norms, often through worksheets that force them to misidentify basic shapes as a way to deprogram their understanding of objective truth. Furthermore, teachers often attempt to ingrain the idea that parents are from a “different era” and cannot understand modern problems, encouraging children to seek guidance from different



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“trusted adults” instead. The environment is described as increasingly hostile toward faith; Boggess notes that it is considered acceptable to wear a hijab, but not a cross.

It is here that Boggess invokes a warning from the father of American public education, **Horace Mann**, who famously wrote: “**Men are cast-iron; but children are wax.**”

To Boggess, this is not a poetic metaphor — it is a diagnosis. Children are impressionable, moldable, and vulnerable. And in her view, the system is molding them toward confusion, dependency, and moral relativism.

### Academic Collapse and Data Fraud

The moral concerns are matched by a staggering decline in academic standards and reports of data manipulation. While Utah offers trade programs for students not heading to college, the entry exams—written at a 5th-grade level—are failed by 80% of high schoolers. Students are also losing basic penmanship skills, often unable to properly print or place spaces between letters, a problem Boggess notes has existed since at least 2015.

Over 100 teachers have confided in Boggess that they only complete 20% of their grade-level curriculum annually, as they are forced to act as “juvie hall guards” dealing with persistent

classroom disruptions. Perhaps most disturbing are the allegations of “data fraud,” where schools report sexual assaults and indecency as minor “disruptive behavior” to protect their safety ratings. Some schools have even created arbitrary “Tier 4” coding systems to hide Tier 3 offenses, artificially making schools appear safer than they are.

### Why the System Won’t Fix Itself

Boggess explains that local school boards often refuse to address deficient curriculum due to a “sunk cost” mentality. Because districts have already invested heavily in specific materials, they are reluctant to remove them until they get their “money’s worth”. Boggess compares this to a parent who realizes their babysitter is a danger to their child: “That is like saying, I prepaid for my babysitter... and even though I now know he is a pedophile, I won’t get my money back so let’s just let him finish up”.

### A Call to Action

Boggess insists that parents must stop assuming someone else will fix these problems. Her roadmap for parents includes:

- **Run for School Board:** Seek positions to ensure oversight and resist the “boot camp” pressure.
- **Attend Board Meetings:** Use the power of observation to hold officials accountable.
- **Get Involved:** Don’t assume someone else will fix it; the cost of doing nothing is the academic and moral safety of the next generation.
  - \* **Start a Moms For Liberty Chapter or other similar parent’s Rights Group**
- **Protect Your Children:** Take decisive action to safeguard your child’s environment. 🇺🇸



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**INVESTIGATIVE REPORT (from page 8A)**

The Republicans who vote with Democrats to give this money to corporations instead of the workforce include:

- Sen. Llew Jones (Conrad)
- Rep. Ed Buttrey (Great Falls)
- Rep. Courtenay Sprunger (Kalispell)
- Rep. Tony Brockman (Kalispell)
- Rep. Dave Bedey (Hamilton)
- Rep. Brad Barker (Carbon County)

Rep. Dave Bedey previously served as CFO of Vali Cooper International (VCI), a company involved in hospital and medical infrastructure projects. According to Montana campaign finance records, the Montana Hospital Association has spent over \$200,000 in direct contributions, including to Bedey. Consequently, Bedey voted for Medicaid Expansion—a program that directly benefits hospital systems and associations that fund his campaigns.

Rep. Brad Barker, a member of the “Solutions Caucus,” received significant primary support from the Montana Hospital Association (MHA) and other similarly situated PACs. According to Montana budget records from 2023–2024, Barker supported budgets that expanded general fund spending significantly during his tenure, including support for large appropriations packages critics describe as slush funds.

**Zero to Five Montana: The State’s “Private Arm”**

The primary organization managing these state funds is Zero to Five Montana, a non-profit (NGO) that functions as a “private arm” of the state government.

According to the 2024 Form 990 filed by Zero to Five Montana, the organization reported \$2,621,021 in total revenue, of which \$2,613,718 (over 99.7%) came from contributions and grants—almost entirely from the State of Montana through DPHHS contracts.

By funneling money through an NGO instead of a state agency, the government gains several structural advantages:

1. **Reduced Direct Oversight:** NGOs operate under contract rather than direct legislative line-item control, allowing program flexibility outside standard civil service constraints.
2. **Faster Hiring and Procurement:** Nonprofits are not bound by the same state hiring rules, pay bands, or

procurement regulations, allowing quicker implementation.

3. **Political Buffering:** Policy experimentation can occur at arm’s length from elected officials, reducing direct political accountability.
4. **Grant Structuring Flexibility:** NGOs can design sub-grant programs, pilot models, and eligibility rules without formal administrative rulemaking.

In this context, “promote innovation” means funding experimental grant models such as employer-sponsored childcare, business coaching systems, shared-services alliances, and public-private partnerships instead of directly appropriating funds for wage increases.

It allows the state to claim reform and modernization—new models, new partnerships, new infrastructure—without permanently increasing wage floors or creating long-term entitlement obligations for teacher compensation.

For example:

- **Child Care Business Connect:** According to the 2022 ARPA grant award documentation, Zero to Five Montana was awarded the full \$5 million ARPA grant in 2022 to operate this initiative. Instead of paying teachers more, this \$5 million goes toward business training and “stabilization” for owners.

Stabilization in this context means providing business coaching, financial management assistance, operational consulting, debt restructuring guidance, and operational overhead support to childcare owners so their businesses remain solvent. It does not mandate wage increases for teachers. It does not create permanent salary adjustments. It is designed to stabilize the business entity, not the individual worker. It begs the questions too of who are the consultants and how much are they getting paid.

- **Family Forward Montana:** According to the 2024 Employer-Sponsored Grant Program description published by familyforwardmt.org, this is a \$2 million grant program funded by the state’s federal Bright Futures B-5 grant and administered by Zero to Five Montana.

The Family Forward program is corporate welfare. It gives state grants of \$10,000 to \$100,000 to private companies to help them provide childcare specifically for their own employees. According to the January 2, 2024 press release issued by Zero to Five Montana, these grants range from \$10,000 to

\$100,000 per employer.

- **The Intent:** The state claims this encourages “public-private partnerships” to solve the childcare shortage.
- **The Reality:** Taxpayer money is being handed to successful businesses—like AdvicePay, Inc. (a software firm) and Alpine Physical Therapy—to build their own “infrastructure” or pay tuition for their staff. According to the 2025 Family Forward Montana Cohort 1 Grantees List, these employers received grant funding through the program.

While these businesses get grants to “connect” to care, the actual teachers at the heart of the system still make near-poverty wages. The state is building the “rooms” and “business plans,” but it isn’t paying the “people” who make childcare possible.

Montana’s childcare crisis persists because the state has chosen to use federal childcare dollars in ways that do little to strengthen the workforce or expand access for the public. In a functioning free market, wages would rise naturally as demand for qualified teachers outpaces supply. But once the federal government created childcare-restricted grants, the state assumed a responsibility to spend those dollars wisely—within the constraints of the program—rather than diverting them into corporate welfare or administrative overhead.

Instead, millions have been routed into NGO administrative costs, infrastructure projects that sit empty, and employer-only childcare subsidies that benefit private companies rather than the general public. These employer-exclusive grants effectively use federal childcare funds to subsidize private HR benefits, not to expand access to care for Montana families. Meanwhile, parents continue paying an average of \$11,700 per child for care they still cannot find, and teachers remain trapped in poverty-level wages because the dollars intended to stabilize the system never reach the classroom.

The result is a childcare system that builds rooms it cannot staff, funds programs that do not serve the public, and props up administrative intermediaries instead of strengthening the labor supply. Until Montana stops using federal childcare funds to subsidize private employers and bureaucratic layers—and instead directs those dollars toward solutions that actually expand the workforce—parents and teachers will continue to bear the cost of a system that fails to deliver care. 🚩

**MONTANA’S NOT FOR SALE (from page 13A)**

establishment was certain that New York Governor William H. Seward would be their presidential nominee. Seward was so confident that he had a celebratory cannon ready at his home and had already bid farewell to his Senate colleagues. Abraham Lincoln was the clear underdog, a man many delegates had never even heard of.

But a simple, unexpected event changed the course of history. A printer’s delay—rumored to be caused by a stop for beer—meant the ballots weren’t ready on a Thursday evening. That 17-hour recess gave grassroots activists and those resentful of Seward’s broken promises the window they needed to lobby the delegations in the taverns of Chicago. By the time voting began on Friday, the “safe” establishment pick

was crumbling. Lincoln, the rail-splitter from Illinois, clinched the nomination in a dramatic upset that paved his path to the presidency.

Montana finds itself in its own “Chicago convention” moment. We are faced with a system that appears increasingly controlled by a few powerful figures who react to decisions made elsewhere rather than directing a transparent process for the voters. From retaliatory policing and “two-tier” justice systems in our counties to pre-selected successors in our federal races, the message to the grassroots has been clear: sit down and follow the plan.

But as Lincoln’s victory proved, the most effective way to challenge a preselected process is not disengagement, but participation. A true

conservative protests at the ballot box. By voting for Dr. Al Olszewski, Montanans can reject the insider-driven “succession” and prove that our nominees are chosen by the people, not the “club”. If we do not step up in this primary, we risk cementing a system where insider influence dominates every future race, effectively ending meaningful competition in our state.

On June 2, we have the chance to show that Montana still values the “underdog” over the “insider”. Like the delegates who shifted to Lincoln in 1860, we can choose a candidate who represents grassroots principles over establishment-backed selections. It is time to push back against the beltway billionaires and restore legitimacy to our elections. Vote for Dr. O, and let the people of Montana decide our future. 🚩

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**For Many Missoulians, Affordability Isn't Politics — It's Survival**

Missoula families are feeling the strain of rising costs in every direction — groceries, utilities, housing, and especially property taxes. For many of us, the last few years have felt like a steady tightening of the belt with no relief in sight. The recent property tax bill only made things harder. Homeowners saw increases they couldn't plan for, renters absorbed higher costs passed down to them, and small landlords struggled to keep their units affordable while staying afloat themselves.

These are not abstract policy debates. These are kitchen-table realities for thousands of people across our county.

This is why I support Ryan Darling. Ryan understands what these financial pressures look like for ordinary Montanans. He has spent years listening to families, seniors, and small business owners who are being squeezed by decisions made in Helena that don't reflect the day-to-day realities of the people who live here. He believes that tax policy should be predictable, transparent, and fair — not a surprise bill that pushes people out of their homes or forces them to choose between essentials.

Ryan has been clear that Montana needs real reform. He wants a property tax system that doesn't punish long-time residents, doesn't destabilize renters, and doesn't leave families wondering how they'll make it through another year. He believes in responsible budgeting, honest accounting, and policies that strengthen communities rather than burden them.

These are the issues that matter most to the people I talk to every day. They want leaders who understand that affordability is not a partisan talking point — it's the difference between staying in Missoula or being priced out of it. They want someone who will stand up



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for homeowners, renters, and working families who feel like they've been carrying the load alone.

I believe Ryan is that kind of leader. He is steady, thoughtful, and committed to bringing practical solutions to Helena. He listens. He asks questions. And he never forgets who he's working for.

Missoula deserves a representative who will fight for economic stability and real relief for the people who live here. I believe Ryan Darling will do exactly that. Please consider donating to his campaign, by volunteering to knock on doors or financially supporting his campaign.

Thank you,  
Cindy Tucker Johnson  
Missoula, MT

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**When Policies Affect Children, Definitions Matter — So Do the Leaders Who Make Them**

Missoulians care deeply about fairness, clarity, and the wellbeing of children. That's why it's important to understand the differences in how local leaders approach sensitive social issues. According to the recent legislative chart, Representative Tom France voted No on bills involving biological sex definitions, sex segregated facilities, protections for individuals who decline nonbiological

pronouns, restrictions on gender altering treatments for minors, school choice expansion, and religious freedom protections.

My friend Ryan Darling approaches these issues with a different philosophy—one centered on clear definitions, parental involvement, and caution when policies affect children. Ryan believes families should have more educational options, that public facilities should follow consistent and predictable standards, and that minors should be protected from irreversible medical decisions until they are old enough to fully understand the consequences. He also believes religious organizations should be able to serve their communities without unnecessary government pressure.

These are meaningful differences. Representative France's voting record reflects one approach to governance; Ryan's views reflect another—one grounded in clarity, responsibility, and respect for families. Missoula voters deserve to see these contrasts clearly so they can make informed decisions about the future of our community.

I believe Ryan is worth supporting because he believes in our constitution and works for the good of the people!

Thank you,  
Nancy J Engebretson  
Alberton, MT

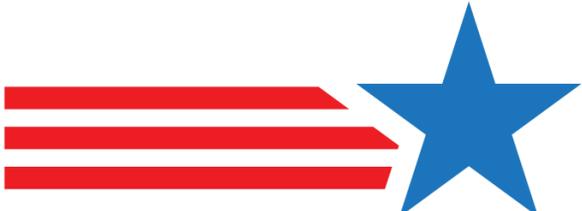


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**GOVERNMENT ABUSE (from page 5A)**

force progressive agendas.

4. **Practice interposition now.** Local leaders should refuse to enforce unconstitutional federal mandates — whether on harmful school curricula, property rights, or business regulations. Citizens can petition, protest, and vote to back them up.

5. **Pray for revival.** Ask God to raise up

courageous lesser magistrates who will restore a nation under Him and when he does, show up! Support those leaders at public meetings. You don't need to even make public comment. Just being there can make all the difference.

The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates is not dusty history — it is a living blueprint for righteous resistance. Conservatives who complain about federal tyranny but refuse to engage locally

are part of the problem. The fight for liberty begins in your county courthouse, your school board meeting, and your sheriff's office.

It is time to stop watching from the sidelines. Run. Support. Interpose. The future of your family, your community, and your country depends on conservatives finally getting involved where it matters most — at the local level. The lesser magistrates are waiting to be called to duty. Will you answer?

# Weaponized Immigration Methods Aimed at America



© Hinterhaus Productions via Getty Images

By Jenna Lee | The Daily Signal

Rival nations are weaponizing immigration to America, according to an author who investigates foreign influence in the United States. Experts gathered at The Heritage Foundation Wednesday to discuss how this works.

Peter Schweizer, president of the Government Accountability Institute and author of “The Invisible Coup: How American Elites and Foreign Powers Use Immigration as a Weapon,” explained that Mexico uses mass immigration as an entrance for Mexicans to “reclaim” their territory and push their power in the U.S.

Schweizer quoted Mexican Sen. Felix Salgado: “Mexicans are in our territory. California, Nevada, Texas, Utah, Oklahoma, Colorado,

and Wyoming. We’re going to take back the territory that was stolen from us.”

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The Mexican government’s December 2024 official report listed the number of Mexicans in the United States at 39.9 million.

Mexico also has officials living full-time in the U.S. who serve in the Mexican government at the same time to “represent Mexicans living inside the United States before the Mexican government.”

Schweizer also discussed how China exploits the U.S. birthright citizenship laws through its so-called birth tourism industry.

Birth tourism is when expecting mothers travel to another country so that their child has citizenship there.

Companies in the birth tourism industry in China, according to Schweizer, arrange for pregnant women to fly to the U.S. for a fee between \$80,000-\$100,000 to have their children in America and return to China to raise them under the Chinese Communist Party.

But since the child would be considered a U.S. citizen, Schweizer stressed that “when they turn 18, they’re gonna be able to vote in our elections, contribute to political campaigns, and donate to political campaigns, and take government jobs.”

## Gianforte’s Giveaways to Data Centers A RAW DEAL FOR MONTANANS

By Anna Marie White

Montana stands at an energy and economic crossroads as large-scale data centers—driven by AI and high-performance computing demands—target the state. The proposed Quantica Infrastructure project, known as Big Sky Digital Infrastructure (or Big Sky Campus), exemplifies this trend. Located on over 5,100 acres south of Broadview in Yellowstone County (north of Billings), the development has drawn attention, scrutiny, and controversy since its announcement in 2025.

Why are data centers suddenly targeting Montana? Governor Greg Gianforte has made recruiting them a top priority. He co-hosted summits with the Montana Chamber of Commerce, established the “Unleashing American-Made Energy Task Force” in 2025 to fast-track infrastructure for these projects, and signed a memorandum of understanding with Japanese multinational Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) to attract foreign investment specifically in data centers and



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power infrastructure projects in southern Montana. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries—one of Japan’s largest corporations, specializing

in heavy industry, energy systems, power generation, and large-scale infrastructure—

(continued on page 2B)



**GIANFORTE'S GIVEAWAYS (from page 1B)**

is a foreign investor from Japan. The MOU, signed during a 2025 trade mission to Tokyo, formalizes collaboration to evaluate feasibility and potential investments that could include data center development powered by new or existing energy sources. The Montana Chamber of Commerce—long criticized for doing the dirty work of establishment corporations rather than protecting Main Street businesses and working families—is actively helping woo these high-energy users through joint promotions and events.

Here are three key takeaways from public reporting, filings, announcements, and related developments surrounding Quantica's plans:

**1. Massive Scale and Power Ambitions, with Ties to NorthWestern Energy**

Quantica Infrastructure—a Texas-based company backed by private equity firm EnCap Investments—acquired over 5,100 acres in 2024 through its subsidiary Montana Property LLC, initially under the radar as agricultural land purchases. The site is positioned for a phased “energy and digital infrastructure campus” starting construction in 2026, with initial capacity targeting 500 MW and full expansion to 1 GW (1,000 MW). This would support AI, hyperscale, and HPC operations, integrating on-site renewables, battery storage, and grid connections. In July 2025, NorthWestern Energy signed a letter of intent to provide regulated electric service for the project, potentially starting as early as 2026 and scaling to full Phase 1 by around 2030. The 1 GW of power demand is the equivalent of powering nearly one million Montana households for a full year (based on U.S. Energy Information Administration residential consumption data showing Montana households average 9,308 kWh per year). That scale raises serious questions about how such enormous demand will impact affordability and reliability for existing ratepayers.

**2. Promises of Sustainability and Local Benefits, Amid Community and Legal Pushback**

Quantica emphasizes “Montana values,” renewable integration, low-latency fiber connectivity to major markets, and economic growth through skilled jobs and infrastructure. The company positions the campus as shovel-ready in parts, with grid power targeted for 2027 and a focus on sustainable, dispatchable energy. However, the project faces challenges: A February 2026 lawsuit from a Montana businessman alleges Quantica (via subsidiary Broad Reach Power) “stole” a prior data center deal by promising power access that never materialized. Broader community concerns include water usage in an arid region, potential strain on local infrastructure, and whether promised benefits truly flow to residents rather than distant investors. Environmental groups and observers have flagged data centers’ overall impacts on water and energy bills.

**3. Part of a Larger Pattern: Corporate Priorities vs. Ratepayer Protection**

Quantica’s timeline and scale fit neatly into Governor Gianforte’s push to attract energy-intensive industries. The NorthWestern letter of intent—combined with the utility’s discussions on other developers—highlights how utilities navigate serving high-return large loads while managing regulated obligations. Yet Montanans are not getting the transparency they deserve. The same PSC majority—President Jeff Welborn, Vice President Jennifer Fielder, and Commissioner Annie Bukacek—that withdrew the Commission’s protest at FERC (citing unspecified “errors” without ever explaining them) has repeatedly stepped aside when ratepayer protections were on the line. Meanwhile, NorthWestern Energy quietly transferred its 370 MW share of Colstrip Units 3 and 4—acquired for free—into an unregulated shell company (Colstrip 370Pu LLC),

placing that valuable power beyond the direct regulatory control of the PSC so it could be sold on the wholesale market instead of benefiting Montana families. Governor Greg Gianforte himself weighed in directly. On January 29, 2026, he sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)—the independent federal agency that regulates interstate electricity transmission and wholesale power sales across state lines—explicitly supporting NorthWestern’s filings for the Colstrip 370Pu LLC (Dockets ER26-129-001 and ER26-411-001). In the letter, he urged FERC to approve the deal quickly, grant waivers, and make it effective retroactive to January 1, 2026. He argued this would protect Montana customers by keeping costs out of retail rates and ensure reliability.

Why does this matter for transparency? FERC approval is the critical federal step that finalizes the unregulated affiliate’s ability to sell the 370 MW in wholesale markets (for example, to Mercuria Energy or large industrial users like data centers) with minimal ongoing Montana oversight. By personally intervening to push for swift, retroactive approval, the Governor helped accelerate the process and shorten the window for additional public comments, protests, or scrutiny at the federal level. How is that transparent when the state’s top elected official is actively backing the very “shell game” structure that removes cheap Montana power from ratepayer control and PSC review? Critics see clear parallels: cheap Montana power is being positioned for corporate expansion and data centers while everyday ratepayers risk footing the bill for grid upgrades and higher rates. Grassroots voices have warned that without strong oversight, these projects redirect resources away from households, farmers, and small businesses. Quantica’s integrated model (owning land, pursuing renewables, securing grid backup) may mitigate some risks, but the outcome hinges on transparent regulatory review.

**Growing Calls for Oversight and Accountability**

Even some regulators are sounding the alarm. Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) Commissioner Randy Pinocci, who is currently running for Senate District 12 in the Montana Legislature, has publicly expressed shared concerns about the unchecked growth of data

centers.

“Data centers are a concern for many Montanans and I share their concerns,” Pinocci stated. “The public needs to continue to reach out to me with their concerns so I can try to address them. Currently, data centers don’t have any oversight in the State of Montana. The PSC doesn’t regulate them. What could happen is, when I get to the legislature, I could draft legislation that would require data centers to supply their own power and water, address the level of property taxes that are appropriate as many localities are considering offering tax breaks which harm other local property taxpayers.”

Pinocci’s comments underscore a key frustration: Without stronger rules, data centers could continue benefiting from low property tax classifications (like Class 17 at 0.9% taxable valuation), potential abatements, and access to grid power/water resources—while everyday ratepayers, farmers, and homeowners bear the brunt through higher bills, strained infrastructure, and diverted supplies. His proposed legislative fixes—mandating self-sufficiency for power and water, plus fairer taxation—align with grassroots demands for protections that prevent cost-shifting and ensure any economic promises actually benefit Montanans, not just distant developers.

This project is not isolated—it’s a flashpoint in Montana’s evolving energy landscape. As AI-driven demand surges nationwide, developments like Quantica’s Big Sky Campus test whether the state can capture economic upside without compromising affordability, reliability, local control, or our precious water resources. Are we shafting residents and farmers—whose livelihoods depend on reliable power and water—for the benefit of data centers that consume massive amounts of both? The stakes are high: decisions made now could shape ratepayer bills, grid resilience, community futures, and Montana’s water supply for decades.

Montanans deserve full transparency from utilities, regulators, and developers to ensure these “big sky” ambitions benefit the Treasure State’s everyday residents—not just corporate balance sheets. 🇺🇸

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# Planning Before the Crisis

## The Elder-Care Steps Most Families Overlook

By Shirley Wolfe

Most Americans assume elder-care planning is something to worry about “later.” But for many families, “later” arrives suddenly—after a fall, a stroke, a diagnosis, or a financial emergency. By then, options are limited, costs are higher, and families are left scrambling to make decisions under pressure.

Experts say the most effective elder-care planning happens **years before** health declines or savings run out. Yet many of the most important steps are the ones people rarely hear about. Here are the practical measures families can take now to avoid confusion, conflict, and financial strain down the road.

### Pre-Paying Final Expenses: The Irrevocable Funeral Trust

One of the least-known tools in elder planning is the **irrevocable funeral trust**, often called an IFT. It allows individuals to pre-pay funeral and burial expenses in a protected account that cannot be seized by nursing homes or counted against Medicaid eligibility.

Funeral costs typically range from \$8,000 to \$15,000. Without an IFT, families may be forced to pay these expenses out-of-pocket at the worst possible time. Because Medicaid permits pre-payment of funeral expenses through an irrevocable trust, this step can protect both dignity and family finances.

### The Document Families Regret Not Having: Durable Power of Attorney

A will determines what happens after death. A **durable power of attorney** determines what happens during life.

If someone becomes unable to manage their affairs, banks and financial institutions will not speak to spouses or adult children without a valid power of attorney. Without it, families may have to pursue court-ordered guardianship—a costly, time-consuming process that can take months.

A durable power of attorney should be completed **long before** any cognitive decline. Once capacity is lost, it’s too late to sign one.

### Medical Directives: Preventing Family Conflict

A **medical power of attorney** and **advance directive** outline a person’s wishes for medical care if they cannot speak for themselves. These documents guide decisions about life support, resuscitation, and end-of-life care.

Without clear instructions, families often face agonizing choices. Medical directives spare loved ones from guessing—and from disagreeing—during moments of crisis.

### The “Letter of Instruction”: A Roadmap for Loved Ones

Not a legal document, but often the most valuable one, a **letter of instruction** gathers essential information in one place:



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- Passwords
- Bank and investment accounts
- Insurance policies
- Location of important documents
- Funeral preferences
- Contact lists
- Personal messages

Families frequently report that this simple document made the first 48 hours after a crisis far easier to navigate.

### Beneficiary Forms: The Hidden Trap

Many people assume their will controls who inherits their assets. But for life insurance, retirement accounts, and pensions, **beneficiary forms override the will**.

If those forms are outdated, assets may go to an ex-spouse or deceased relative. Reviewing beneficiaries every few years prevents costly mistakes.

### The High Cost of Long-Term Care

Long-term care is the financial shock most families underestimate:

- Assisted living: \$4,000–\$7,000 per month
- Memory care: \$6,000–\$10,000 per month
- Nursing home care: \$9,000–\$12,000 per month

Most families exhaust their savings within 12 to 18 months.

Planning options—such as long-term care insurance, hybrid life-insurance policies, or early Medicaid planning—are far more effective when started early.

### The Five-Year Lookback Rule

Medicaid reviews **five years** of financial history. Gifts, property transfers, or large withdrawals can trigger penalties that delay eligibility for long-term care coverage.

This rule surprises many families who try to

move assets only after a health crisis. Early planning avoids these complications.

### Organizing Documents Before They’re Needed

Experts recommend keeping all essential documents in one clearly labeled binder or digital folder:

- Will and trust documents
- Powers of attorney
- Medical directives
- Insurance policies
- Deeds and titles
- Financial accounts
- Social Security and Medicare information

In emergencies, organization saves time—and stress.

### Downsizing Before It Becomes Urgent

Many older adults postpone downsizing until a crisis forces a rushed move. Early downsizing reduces fall risks, simplifies caregiving, and allows the older adult to participate in decisions rather than having choices made for them.

### The Conversation Families Avoid

Perhaps the hardest part of elder-care planning is not the paperwork—it’s the conversation. Families often avoid discussing finances, medical wishes, or end-of-life preferences. But silence leads to confusion and conflict.

A single, honest conversation can prevent years of uncertainty.

### Aging Is Inevitable. Crisis Doesn’t Have to Be.

The families who navigate aging most smoothly are not the wealthiest or the luckiest—they are the ones who plan early. By taking a few practical steps now, individuals can protect their dignity, preserve their assets, and spare their loved ones from unnecessary hardship. 🏠



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# The Glyphosate Deception

## What Chemical Companies Never Told America or Its Farmers

By: Lisa Bennett

In the weeks since President Trump signed the February 18, 2026, executive order invoking the Defense Production Act to ramp up domestic production of elemental phosphorus and glyphosate-based herbicides, the Make America Healthy Again movement has been quietly fracturing. Farmers who once viewed the administration as a bulwark against overreach are now raising sharp questions. Moms battling chemicals in school lunches are calling the order “a love letter to glyphosate.” Regenerative cattlemen who escaped the chemical treadmill say the move doesn’t free them—it locks the gate behind them.

The order positions glyphosate—the core of Roundup—as indispensable for food security and national defense. Without it, the text warns, yields collapse, rural economies falter, and affordable food slips out of reach. Yet the court records, the internal emails that litigation finally dragged into daylight, the voices rising from the very movement Trump helped energize, the patent filings that few noticed, the soil and health patterns that emerged in farming communities, and the simple natural options that were never part of the standard advice together sketch a deeper picture: one of studies shelved, science shaped behind closed doors, jury findings of malice, billions changing hands, and federal protection arriving at the precise moment legal pressure peaked—while the same corporate hands hold patents on venom-derived compounds sprayed across the same fields.

No single memo screams conspiracy. But when the 1999 toxicology review, the employee safety sheets, the EPA correspondence, the jury verdicts, the ongoing lawsuits, the venom patents, Jonathan Otto’s stark warning, the documented chemical-pharmaceutical overlaps, the cancer clusters, the soil collapse, and the free alternative of diluted human urine all sit on the same table, the pattern invites anyone paying attention to wonder: in a cycle where corporations fund the research, help write the rules, patent multiple tools, gain government shields when the bills arrive, and leave farmers and families to absorb the costs, whose security is truly being protected?

The documents litigation forced open—the Monsanto Papers—show executives calculating how to draft “independent” studies in-house and pay academics to sign them. One internal



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note celebrated keeping costs down by writing the papers themselves. Another admitted the full Roundup formulation had never been tested for carcinogenicity, even as marketing called it safer than table salt. Monsanto scientist Donna Farmer wrote plainly: “We cannot say Roundup is noncarcinogenic. We have not done the necessary testing.”

**A 1999 secret review by Dr. James Perry at the University of Wales found glyphosate triggers oxidative DNA damage—a cancer pathway.**

Monsanto filed it away. It emerged only years later in California discovery. The World Health Organization’s cancer agency classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen in 2015; Swedish oncologists had drawn the non-Hodgkin lymphoma link in 2001. Yet the EPA’s 2016 review—court papers allege Monsanto staff edited drafts and officials tipped the company about upcoming scrutiny—declared it “not likely to be carcinogenic.” One EPA manager wrote of a federal study that could have shifted everything: “If I can kill this I deserve a medal.”

Juries saw the gap. Dewayne Johnson: \$78.5 million. Hardeman v. Monsanto: \$80.2 million. Alva and Alberta Pilliod: \$2 billion. They examined Monsanto’s own employee safety

sheet requiring respirators, chemical suits, goggles, gloves, and rubber boots—while commercials showed families spraying in shorts and T-shirts. The label they applied: malice.

Bayer, which purchased Monsanto in 2018, has paid billions and still faces 60,000 to 67,000 pending lawsuits in state and federal courts—down from over 100,000, with 4,000–4,400 still in federal court, thousands more in state courts, and new filings continuing. A \$7.25 billion class-action settlement proposal surfaced just before the order. The Supreme Court hears a preemption case April 27 that could decide whether state failure-to-warn claims survive. The February 18 order, declaring glyphosate critical to defense, has attorneys noting it reinforces the same kind of immunity shield vaccine makers have long enjoyed.

Inside MAHA the response has been blunt. Zen Honeycutt of Moms Across America called it a love letter to glyphosate and said it has sharpened the drive to teach families label-reading, backyard growing, and organic choices—mirroring how vaccine mandates once drew attention to side effects. Tony Lyons of MAHA Action spoke of a bailout for a carcinogen while noting the goal of cutting Chinese dependence on phosphorus and generic glyphosate. John Klar, Vermont regenerative farmer and MAHA Action partner, observed rising scrutiny of food sources and growing demand for non-chemical paths. “No one is eating glyphosate in the name of defending national security.”

Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm called glyphosate a deadly poison sustaining GMO corn and soy that mostly feed ethanol plants or leave the country. Will Harris of White Oak Pastures, fourth-generation Georgia cattleman who rebuilt his operation after watching soil and livestock decline, described the order as trapping farmers on a toxic treadmill. He now hosts conventional growers hunting for an exit.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. addressed the tension directly. Pesticides are toxic by design; manufacturers have paid tens of billions settling cancer claims; farm communities report elevated rates. Abrupt removal would spike prices and shutter farms. The order, he said, brings production home from adversaries. HHS, USDA, and EPA followed with a three-pillar strategy and \$700 million in regenerative transition grants—measures MAHA voices are pressing to expand with tax breaks, robotic weeding, and faster alternative approvals.

**Investigators have surfaced another layer. Monsanto—now Bayer—holds the world-leading patents and assignments on animal venom-based pesticides, compounds drawn from funnel-web spiders, cobras, cone snails, black widows, scorpions, wasps, and snakes.**

Jonathan Otto, the Australian investigative

(continued on page 5B)

**Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom.**  
JOHN ADAMS



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**If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.**  
THOMAS PAINE



**GLYPHOSATE (from page 4B)**

journalist and filmmaker known for health advocacy work, has connected these dots in recent discussions tied to the broader pattern. He argues the same corporations shaping agriculture also influence medicine, creating a loop where chemicals damage health and pharmaceuticals manage symptoms. Otto has warned: “We are headed for a mass extinction event, especially with Trump’s Executive Order giving immunity to Bayer for glyphosates. Leaders of chemical and pharmaceutical companies believe in population reduction, so they see their products’ health effects as doing a public service.”

**The broader loop appears in overlapping corporate portfolios: synthetic venom analogs developed for agriculture sit alongside pharmaceutical products like Ozempic and Wegovy, both derived from a hormone found in Gila monster venom.**

The same corporate entities operate seamlessly across food systems, biotechnology, and medicine—connections documented in public patents and pipelines but seldom highlighted for the farmers spraying the fields daily or the families eating the harvest at the end of the supply chain.

Glyphosate itself disrupts the shikimate pathway in soil microbes, killing the organisms that cycle nutrients and fight disease. It binds zinc, iron, manganese, and calcium so plants cannot use them. Dead microbes lead to compaction, harder soil, less water retention—pushing farmers toward more fertilizer and deeper dependency. Resistant “superweeds” now cover more than 100 million acres, forcing higher doses or new chemicals. And the chemical is not only sprayed while crops are growing: it is also applied directly to harvested fields as a desiccant, drying oats, wheat, barley, and other grains right before harvest so they can be collected more efficiently. The result is measurable residues ending up straight in the food supply—especially in everyday oat products that fill grocery shelves and breakfast bowls. Cancer clusters have appeared in farming regions—non-Hodgkin lymphoma in Nebraska children on one street, “lymphoma belt” labels in California’s Central Valley, pets and families affected near sprayed fields. Water runs downhill carrying residues; one French village saw half the homes lose a spouse to cancer before petitions halted roadside spraying that fed directly into the town’s drinking supply. France later banned Roundup for private use. U.S. fields still receive 280 million pounds yearly.

Yet nature quietly offered a different path the entire time—one that never required corporate patents or billion-dollar marketing. Human urine, diluted 1:10 with water, contains the exact nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium sold in expensive bags. The United States produces 180 billion liters of it annually, a free, renewable source simply flushed away. Modern studies confirm it matches synthetic fertilizer performance while feeding soil biology instead of killing it. Thousands of years of use worldwide prove the point. No middleman. No dependency.

Regenerative operations like White Oak Pastures and Polyface show the land

rebounds—soil loosens, microbes return, animals thrive, yields stabilize—without the inputs. Farmers at Harris’s workshops are voting with their boots for the off-ramp. States and localities are already restricting use. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) introduced a bipartisan bill to block funding for the order, stating: “If we’re Making America Healthy Again, government shouldn’t be promoting glyphosate and providing liability immunity for corporations making it.”

No single document brands anyone corrupt. No verdict convicts every regulator. Juries simply weighed what they saw and awarded damages. Internal emails simply recorded what employees wrote to one another. Patents sit in public records. The executive order simply activates existing law to secure supply chains. Urine is simply what the body produces every day.

Yet when the buried DNA-damage study, the ghostwritten papers regulators cited, the EPA coordination, the jury findings of malice, the billions paid, the 60,000-to-67,000 lawsuits still moving through state and federal courts, the national-security shield at peak legal exposure, the venom patents, Otto’s warning, the chemical-pharmaceutical overlaps, the soil collapse, the cancer clusters, the desiccant spraying that puts residues directly into oat products and other foods, and the free natural fertilizer that was never part of the standard advice all occupy the same page, the question lingers for anyone tracing the trail: in a system where corporations fund the science, help draft the rules, patent the tools, gain federal protection when the bills come due, and leave farmers dependent while alternatives are

ignored, whose future is the government really securing?

Farmers, consumers, cancer patients, soil, water, and the next generation now confront the choice the MAHA movement is voicing in the open: keep riding the chemical cycle that courts, documents, juries, and the land itself have repeatedly scrutinized, or accelerate the regenerative and natural path already proving itself on the ground—one handful of soil, one diluted bucket of urine, one independent farmer at a time.

The order did not invent the dependency, the lawsuits, the patents, or the patterns. But it has brought the stakes into sharp relief. When the same government that once oversaw the reviews now deploys defense powers to shield production of a product juries tied to harm—while broader corporate holdings and forgotten natural options raise further questions—the public is left to connect the dots for itself.

And more Americans—inside MAHA, on regenerative farms, and in backyards across the country—are doing exactly that.

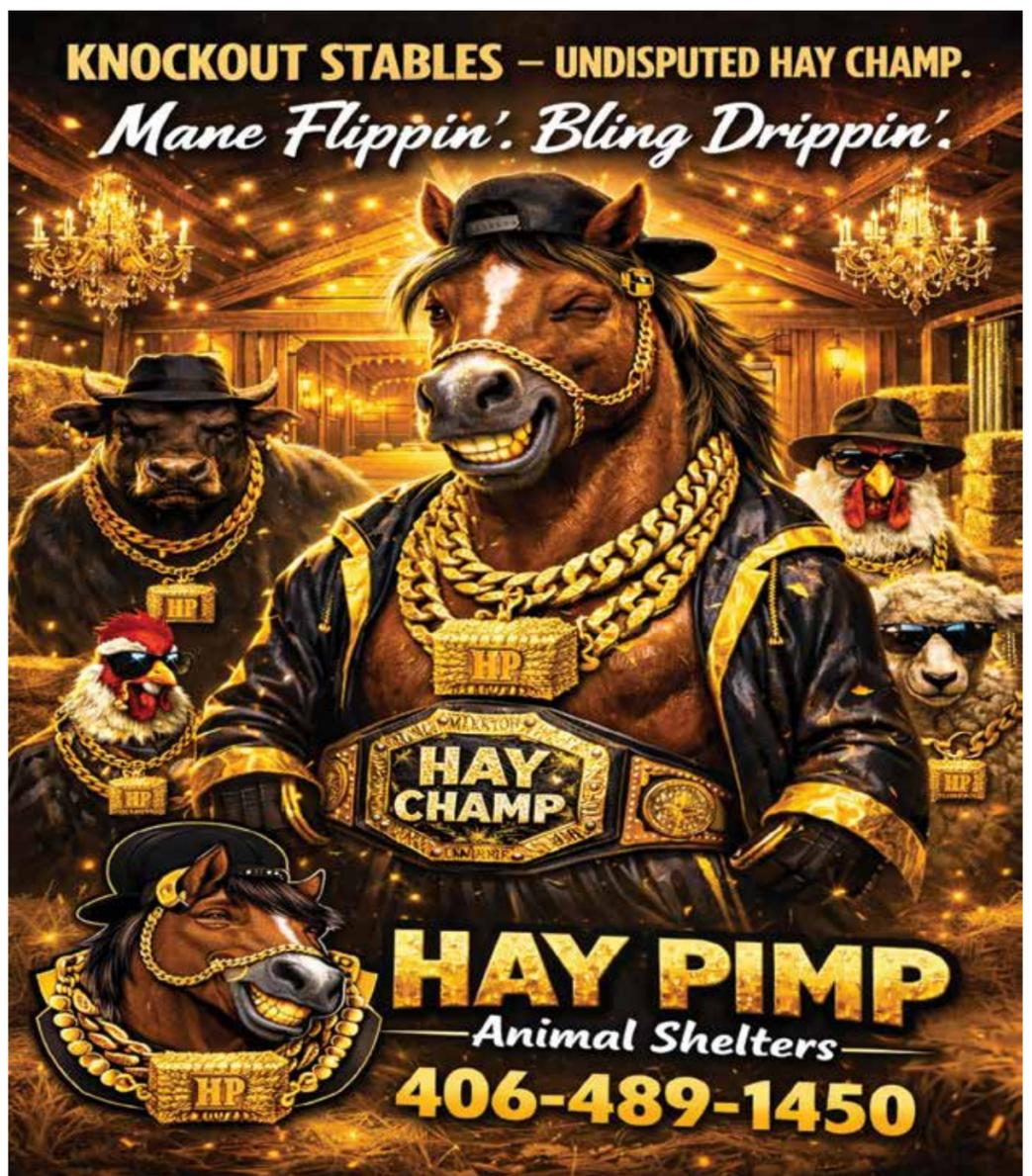
**“Only after the last tree has been cut down,**

**Only after the last river has been poisoned,**

**Only after the last fish has been caught,**

**Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.”**

— Cree Indian Prophecy 🇺🇸





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# As Montana's Next Major Interconnect Takes Shape, Commissioner Pinocci Ensures Grid United Evaluates Composite-Core Solutions That Could Save Ratepayers Money for Decades

By Lisa Bennett

**Miles City, Montana** — As the North Plains Connector continues through its development and permitting process, one of the most consequential engineering decisions remains open: the choice of conductor technology. Recognizing the long-term implications for Montana families and businesses, Public Service Commissioner (PSC) Randy Pinocci stepped in early to ensure that modern composite-core options were not overlooked. To understand why this matters, it helps to know that composite-core conductors replace the traditional steel strength member with engineered composite materials, improving strength-to-weight ratio, thermal stability, and long-term sag performance



Credit: CTC Global

The meeting held in Miles City brought together Grid United, engineers, technology providers, and the public for the first time in a single room. Representative **Greg Kmetz**, who organized the event through **The Patriots Roundtable**, played a key role in making the discussion possible. His efforts ensured that community members could hear directly from Grid United, Epsilon Composite, and CTC Global about the technologies under consideration.

**“This is a once-in-a-generation project,” Pinocci told attendees. “We owe it to the ratepayers to make sure every modern option is evaluated before decisions are locked in.”**

### Montana's Broader Push for Safe, Reliable, Affordable Grid Infrastructure

The discussion in Miles City did not occur in isolation. Over the past two years, Montana has been steadily building a framework for evaluating modern grid technologies. Following the Transmission Infrastructure West conference in San Francisco, Commissioner Pinocci and other energy leaders began emphasizing a simple but essential standard for future infrastructure: the grid must be safe, reliable, and affordable.

That conversation continued when the Montana Public Service Commission held a public

hearing on wildfire safety and grid resilience. According to coverage from NBC Montana, the hearing examined how transmission lines contribute to wildfire ignition and how modern conductor technologies — including composite-core systems — can reduce sag, resist corrosion and fatigue, and maintain safer clearances during extreme heat. Epsilon Composite later summarized the hearing, noting the Commission's willingness to bring technical issues into public view rather than leaving them confined to engineering committees.

These early discussions helped shape meaningful legislative action. Working with lawmakers such as Senator Daniel Zolnikov, Commissioner Pinocci supported policy efforts encouraging utilities to evaluate advanced conductor technologies when planning major upgrades. House Bill 729 and Senate Bill 301 both reflect Montana's growing commitment to ensuring that new infrastructure investments incorporate modern engineering solutions when they improve efficiency and deliver measurable benefits to ratepayers.

### A Rare Opportunity to Influence a Generational Project

The North Plains Connector, a 415-mile transmission line linking Montana to the

Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), may be the last major interconnect the state sees for decades. With conductor technology still undecided, Montana has a rare opportunity to influence the long-term performance, safety, and affordability of the project.

According to project representatives, both traditional steel-core conductors and modern composite-core conductors remain under evaluation. Traditional steel-core conductors have served the electric grid for decades, but they also carry limitations rooted in their original design. Steel cores add weight, are susceptible to corrosion and fatigue in challenging environments, and sag when temperatures rise under heavy electrical loads. Composite-core conductors were developed to address these limitations by replacing the steel strength member with advanced engineered carbon fiber composite materials — similar to those used in modern aircraft. This change allows conductors to achieve dramatically improved strength-to-weight ratios while maintaining superior thermal stability and durability. These properties allow composite conductors to carry greater electrical loads, maintain safer clearances at elevated temperatures, reduce structural loads on

(continued on page 7B)

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**GRID UNITED (from page 6B)**

towers and foundations, and resist corrosion in demanding environments.

ACSR steel-core wire has been the industry standard for generations, but manufacturers such as CTC Global and Epsilon Composite explained that composite-core conductors offer higher strength-to-weight ratios, reduced sag at elevated temperatures, improved wildfire resilience, and lower electrical losses. These technologies are already deployed across the United States and internationally. CTC Global's ACCC® Conductor, for instance, has already been deployed to more than 250 projects in 30 U.S. States and more than 1,300 additional projects in 70 other countries since being commercialized in 2005.

Before the Miles City meeting, Grid United's filings with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality referenced only steel-core conductors, raising concerns that Montana might be headed toward a major infrastructure investment without evaluating newer, more efficient options. Pinocci's involvement ensured that the conversation expanded to include the full range of modern technologies. Grid United representatives said they were open to learning more and agreed to meet with both CTC Global and Epsilon to understand the performance, safety, and long-term cost advantages of composite-core conductors. One attendee summarized the moment by saying the meeting "wasn't about pointing fingers. It was about making sure Montana gets the best line possible."

**Federal Funding Pressures: DOE GRIP Program and the Push for Modern Conductors**

Another factor shaping the conductor-selection process is the U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) program — a multi-billion-dollar federal initiative designed to accelerate grid modernization. Grid United has already received approximately \$700 million in Round 2 GRIP funding, a level of federal support that carries expectations for the use of advanced, future-proof technologies.

The newly announced Round 3 GRIP funding — totaling \$3 billion — places even greater emphasis on reconductoring

projects, specifically encouraging utilities and developers to replace aging steel-core lines with higher-capacity, lower-sag, and more efficient conductors. DOE's stated goal is clear: grow the grid faster, increase transfer capacity, and deploy technologies that can handle rising demand and extreme-weather conditions.

Composite-core conductors align directly with these federal priorities. Their higher strength-to-weight ratio, reduced sag, and improved thermal performance allow existing corridors to carry far more power without rebuilding structures — exactly the type of efficiency DOE is trying to incentivize nationwide. For a project of the North Plains Connector's scale, these advantages translate into major capacity gains and long-term resilience.

Yet despite these benefits, many utilities across the country have been slow to adopt composite-core technology. Industry analysts point to two primary reasons: unfamiliarity and institutional reluctance to change, even when newer materials outperform legacy steel-core designs. This hesitation is one of the challenges DOE is attempting to overcome through GRIP funding — encouraging utilities to modernize rather than default to older, less efficient technologies.

**Why Conductor Choice Matters for Montana Families**

Transmission lines are built to last forty to sixty years, meaning the conductor chosen today will shape Montana's grid — and Montana's household budgets — for decades. The technology decision affects how much power the line can carry, how efficiently it operates, how it performs in extreme heat, how much maintenance it requires, and how much risk it poses during wildfire season.

For Montana, this means the conductor choice is not only an engineering decision but also a strategic one. With billions in federal funding tied to grid modernization and reconductoring, selecting a technology that aligns with national standards and long-term capacity goals may position the North Plains Connector — and Montana ratepayers — for greater economic and operational benefits in the decades ahead.

According to insurance industry data across the West, wildfire-related premiums have risen sharply in recent years. When transmission

lines sag in heat or expand under heavy load — as traditional steel-core conductors do — the risk of line-to-vegetation contact increases. Those contacts are a leading cause of catastrophic wildfires. Every major wildfire drives insurance rates higher, and in some states insurers have withdrawn entirely. Montana is already seeing early signs of the same trend.

Choosing a conductor that reduces wildfire risk is not just an engineering decision — it is a housing-affordability decision. Modern composite-core conductors maintain far better sag performance at elevated temperatures because the composite core does not lose strength the way steel does. Depending on the design, composite conductors can also operate at lower temperatures for a given ampacity when they use higher-aluminum content, which reduces electrical resistance. At the same time, these systems can safely operate at higher temperature limits when needed without the dramatic thermal expansion seen in steel-core wire. Engineers familiar with the technology note that these characteristics — cooler operation at equal load, higher allowable operating temperatures, and far less sag under heat — translate directly into fewer ignition risks, fewer catastrophic fires, fewer insurance claims.

**Cost, Structure, and Efficiency Advantages**

Projects of this scale also highlight an important reality in infrastructure development: when transmission corridors extend hundreds of miles, even small engineering improvements can create substantial economic and operational benefits. Marginal gains in material performance, structural loading, electrical efficiency, or installation requirements can translate into millions of dollars in savings when multiplied across the full length of a project. A cost comparison presented by industry engineers illustrates the changing economics of advanced conductors.

Manufacturers of composite core conductors have spent decades developing and deploying these technologies around the world, and their participation in the Miles City discussion gave community members the opportunity to hear directly from companies with real-world experience implementing advanced conductor systems. In recent years, both major

(continued on page 8B)



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**GRID UNITED (from page 7B)**

manufacturers have introduced newer product lines designed to bring composite technology much closer to the price of conventional steel core wire. By reducing material costs while preserving the key engineering advantages of a composite core, these modern platforms allow developers to consider advanced conductors not only for their performance benefits but also for their structural savings and potential capital-cost advantages.

Because composite core designs dramatically reduce sag and weigh significantly less than steel-core wire, they impose far lower mechanical loads on towers and foundations. This reduction in structural loading is one of the most important engineering advantages of composite conductors: lighter weight means less force on tower arms and foundations, and improved sag performance means less vertical and horizontal loading during high-temperature or high-ampacity conditions. As a result, utilities can build shorter towers, use smaller concrete pads, and require less steel — all major cost drivers in transmission construction. Structural engineers note that these savings can exceed the modest per-foot

price difference between conventional ACSR and modern composite platforms, making the advanced option not only safer and more efficient but potentially more affordable overall.

The structural benefits can also appear in different ways depending on the project: in new builds, lighter conductors and improved sag performance can reduce structure size or foundation requirements; in existing corridors, higher capacity can be achieved without rebuilding structures; and even where structures remain unchanged, reduced weight, better thermal stability, and improved clearance at elevated temperatures can deliver meaningful long-term cost and performance gains across hundreds of miles of line.

It's also noteworthy that the composite core's lighter weight allows the use of ~28% more conductive aluminum — without a weight or diameter penalty. The added aluminum content can reduce electrical line losses by 25 to 40% or more. This not only reduces consumer costs, it also frees-up wasted generation capacity that can help utilities meet demand challenges with less generation investment.

**New Diagnostic Capabilities: A Major Shift for Utilities**

Both major composite-core conductor manufacturers offer diagnostic and monitoring capabilities, though the underlying approaches differ. Modern composite-core platforms can incorporate fiber-optic sensing technologies capable of providing real-time temperature and strain monitoring along the transmission line.

Some composite conductor systems (including CTC Global's ACCC InfoCore™ System) uses fiber-optic strands within the composite core itself, allowing utilities to verify core integrity before, during or after installation. More recently, CTC Global introduced the GridVista™ System that uses a more robust optical fiber to deliver continuous, real-time, high-resolution data across the entire length of the conductor. This intelligence is shared continuously to the GridVista™ platform, where advanced analytics are applied to line data to detect anomalies, predict failures, optimize dynamic line ratings, and enable AI-driven insights. These insights are further enhanced by a suite of AI-powered tools from CTC Global's partners, Google Cloud and Tapestry, to improve grid capacity, reliability, and safety.

Epsilon Composite offers a different design approach in which fiber-optic sensing can be integrated within the outer conductor stranding rather than inside the structural core. This configuration also enables real-time temperature and strain monitoring while preserving the structural independence of the composite strength member.

Both approaches provide utilities with visibility into conductor operating conditions that traditional steel-core conductors cannot offer. In addition to embedded sensing options, there are also independent grid-monitoring platforms such as Prisma Photonics and Heimdall that can clamp onto existing transmission lines and provide real-time operational data using the infrastructure already in place.

Epsilon also offers its CORECHECK system, a dielectric, non-destructive verification method used to confirm the integrity of the composite core after shipment and installation. Rather than serving as a continuous monitoring tool, CORECHECK functions as a field-verification and quality-assurance capability, allowing utilities to validate that the strength member is structurally sound before the line is energized and during periodic inspections.

For utilities, these capabilities represent a significant improvement over traditional steel-core conductors, which offer no way to assess the internal condition of the strength member once installed. Whether through embedded sensing, external monitoring platforms, or field-verification tools, modern composite-core systems give operators far greater visibility into line condition, supporting better maintenance planning, improved reliability, and reduced wildfire-risk exposure.

**Durability and Long-Term Performance**

Durability is another factor. Unlike steel-core conductors that can corrode over time, composite materials are highly resistant to environmental degradation. Test data suggests that composite-core systems can achieve service lifespans approaching or exceeding 120 years under normal operating conditions — significantly longer than many traditional steel-core alternatives.

Composite conductors also offer long-term electrical efficiency benefits. Even small improvements in efficiency accumulate when applied across infrastructure designed to operate for decades. Because the North Plains Connector spans such a large distance, marginal gains in design or materials can have outsized impacts on the overall project.

**A Model for Public Engagement**

As the North Plains Connector continues through the development and permitting process, conversations like the one held in Miles City will remain essential. They show how developers, engineers, policymakers, and communities can work together to evaluate the best possible solutions for building the next generation of America's electric grid-while keeping it reliable, safe, and affordable as PSC Commissioner Pinocci likes to say.

**Learn more at:**

North Plains Connector — <https://northplainsconnector.com/>  
 The Patriots Roundtable — <https://www.facebook.com/patriots.roundtable/>  
 Event recording — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2RhcmKUbU>

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# Montana Targeted for Data Centers

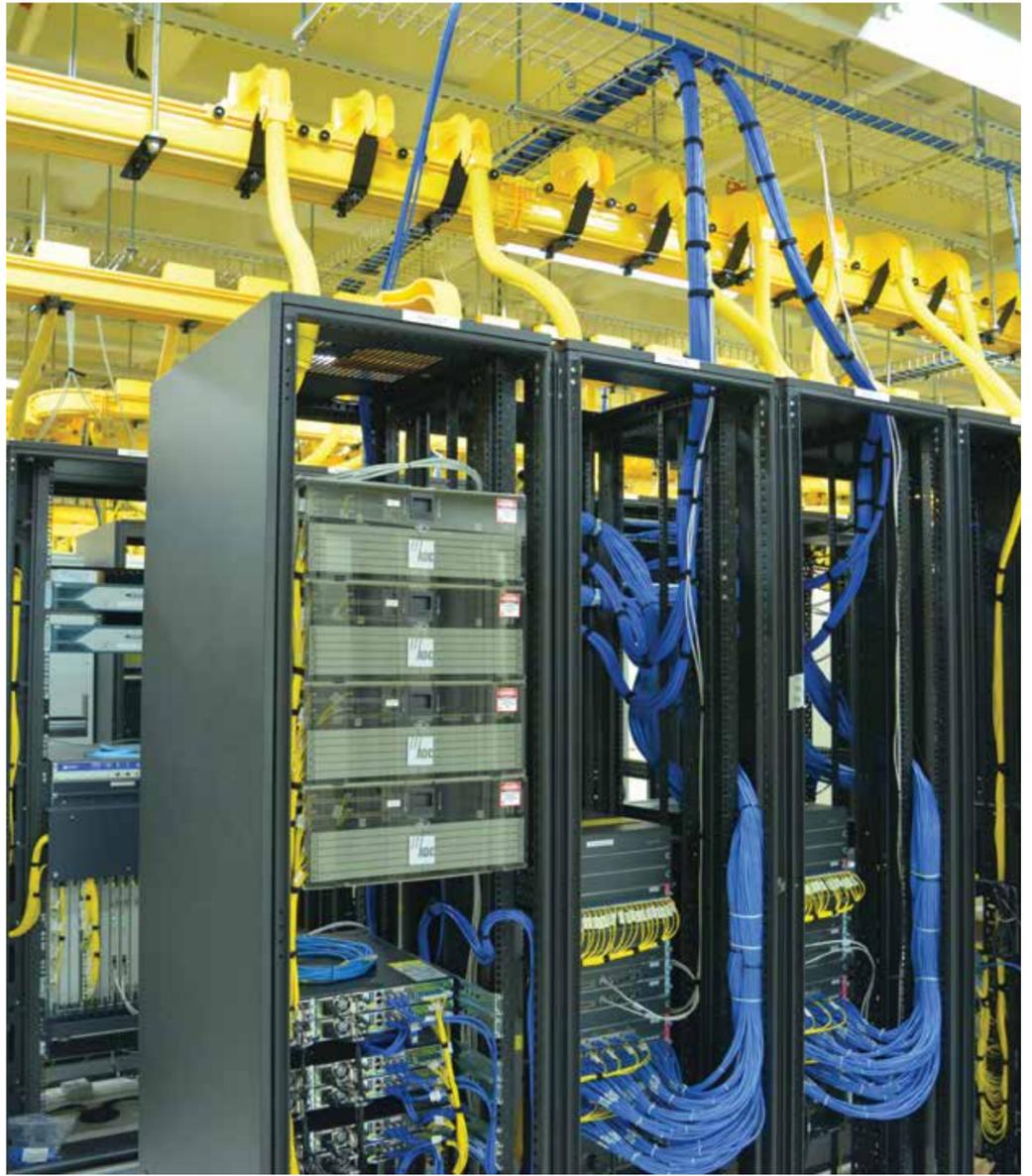
By Staff Writer

Montana stands at an energy and economic crossroads as large-scale data centers—driven by AI and high-performance computing demands—target the state. The proposed Quantica Infrastructure project, known as Big Sky Digital Infrastructure (or Big Sky Campus), exemplifies this trend. Located on over 5,100 acres south of Broadview in Yellowstone County (north of Billings), the development has drawn attention, scrutiny, and controversy since its announcement in 2025.

**Why are data centers suddenly targeting Montana?** Governor Greg Gianforte has made recruiting them a top priority. He co-hosted summits with the Montana Chamber of Commerce, established the “Unleashing American-Made Energy Task Force” in 2025 to fast-track infrastructure for these projects, and signed a memorandum of understanding with Japanese multinational Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) to attract foreign investment specifically in data centers and power infrastructure projects in southern Montana. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries—one of Japan’s largest corporations, specializing in heavy industry, energy systems, power generation, and large-scale infrastructure—is a foreign investor from Japan. The MOU, signed during a 2025 trade mission to Tokyo, formalizes collaboration to evaluate feasibility and potential investments that could include data center development powered by new or existing energy sources. The Montana Chamber of Commerce—long criticized for doing the dirty work of establishment corporations rather than protecting Main Street businesses and working families—is actively helping woo these high-energy users through joint promotions and events.

Here are three key takeaways from public reporting, filings, announcements, and related developments surrounding Quantica’s plans:

**Massive Scale and Power Ambitions, with Ties to NorthWestern Energy** Quantica Infrastructure—a Texas-based company backed by private equity firm EnCap Investments—acquired over 5,100 acres in 2024 through its subsidiary Montana Property LLC, initially under the radar as agricultural land purchases. The site is positioned for a phased “energy and digital infrastructure campus” starting construction in 2026, with initial capacity targeting 500 MW and full expansion to 1 GW (1,000 MW). This would support AI, hyperscale, and HPC operations, integrating on-site renewables, battery storage, and grid connections. In July 2025, NorthWestern Energy signed a letter of intent to provide



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regulated electric service for the project, potentially starting as early as 2026 and scaling to full Phase 1 by around 2030. The 1 GW of power demand is the equivalent of powering nearly one million Montana households for a full year (based on U.S. Energy Information Administration residential consumption data showing Montana households average 9,308 kWh per year). That scale raises serious questions about how such enormous demand will impact affordability and reliability for existing ratepayers.

**Promises of Sustainability and Local Benefits, Amid Community and Legal Pushback** Quantica emphasizes “Montana values,” renewable integration, low-latency fiber connectivity to major markets, and economic growth through skilled jobs and infrastructure. The company positions the campus as shovel-ready in parts, with grid power targeted for 2027 and a focus on sustainable, dispatchable energy. However, the project faces challenges: A February 2026 lawsuit from a Montana businessman alleges Quantica (via subsidiary Broad Reach Power) “stole” a prior data center deal by promising power access that never materialized. Broader community concerns include water usage in an arid region, potential strain on local infrastructure, and whether promised benefits truly flow to residents rather than distant investors. Environmental groups and observers have flagged data centers’ overall impacts on water and energy bills.

**Part of a Larger Pattern: Corporate Priorities vs. Ratepayer Protection** Quantica’s timeline and scale fit neatly into Governor Gianforte’s push to attract energy-intensive industries. The NorthWestern letter of intent—combined with the utility’s discussions on other developers—highlights how utilities navigate serving high-return large loads while managing regulated obligations. Yet Montanans are not getting the transparency they deserve. The same PSC majority—President Jeff Welborn, Vice President Jennifer Fielder, and Commissioner Annie Bukacek—that withdrew the Commission’s protest at FERC (citing unspecified “errors” without ever explaining them) has repeatedly stepped aside when ratepayer protections were on the line. Meanwhile, NorthWestern Energy quietly transferred its 370 MW share of Colstrip Units 3 and 4—acquired for free—into an unregulated shell company (Colstrip 370Pu LLC), placing that valuable power beyond the direct regulatory control of the PSC so it could be sold on the wholesale market instead of benefiting Montana families. Governor Greg Gianforte himself weighed in directly. On January 29, 2026, he sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

(FERC)—the independent federal agency that regulates interstate electricity transmission and wholesale power sales across state lines—explicitly supporting NorthWestern’s filings for the Colstrip 370Pu LLC (Dockets ER26-129-001 and ER26-411-001). In the letter, he urged FERC to approve the deal quickly, grant waivers, and make it effective retroactive to January 1, 2026. He argued this would protect Montana customers by keeping costs out of retail rates and ensure reliability.

**Why does this matter for transparency?** FERC approval is the critical federal step that finalizes the unregulated affiliate’s ability to sell the 370 MW in wholesale markets (for example, to Mercuria Energy or large industrial users like data centers) with minimal ongoing Montana oversight. By personally intervening to push for swift, retroactive approval, the Governor helped accelerate the process and shorten the window for additional public comments, protests, or scrutiny at the federal level. How is that transparent when the state’s top elected official is actively backing the very “shell game” structure that removes cheap Montana power from ratepayer control and PSC review? Critics see clear parallels: cheap Montana power is being positioned for corporate expansion and data centers while everyday ratepayers risk footing the bill for grid upgrades and higher rates. Grassroots voices have warned that without strong oversight, these projects redirect resources away from households, farmers, and small businesses. Quantica’s integrated model (owning land, pursuing renewables, securing grid backup) may mitigate some risks, but the outcome hinges on transparent regulatory review.

This project is not isolated—it’s a flashpoint in Montana’s evolving energy landscape. As AI-driven demand surges nationwide, developments like Quantica’s Big Sky Campus test whether the state can capture economic upside without compromising affordability, reliability, local control, or our precious water resources. Are we shafting residents and farmers—whose livelihoods depend on reliable power and water—for the benefit of data centers that consume massive amounts of both? The stakes are high: decisions made now could shape ratepayer bills, grid resilience, community futures, and Montana’s water supply for decades.

Montanans deserve full transparency from utilities, regulators, and developers to ensure these “big sky” ambitions benefit the Treasure State’s everyday residents—not just corporate balance sheets. 🗡️

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# The Arabella Tentacles Reaching Into Montana

How Out-of-State Dark Money Tied To Leftist Groups Built a Campaign Machine Inside Montana's Republican Primaries (Article 3 in a series about leftist dark money groups trying to capture Montana)

By Montana Sentinel Press

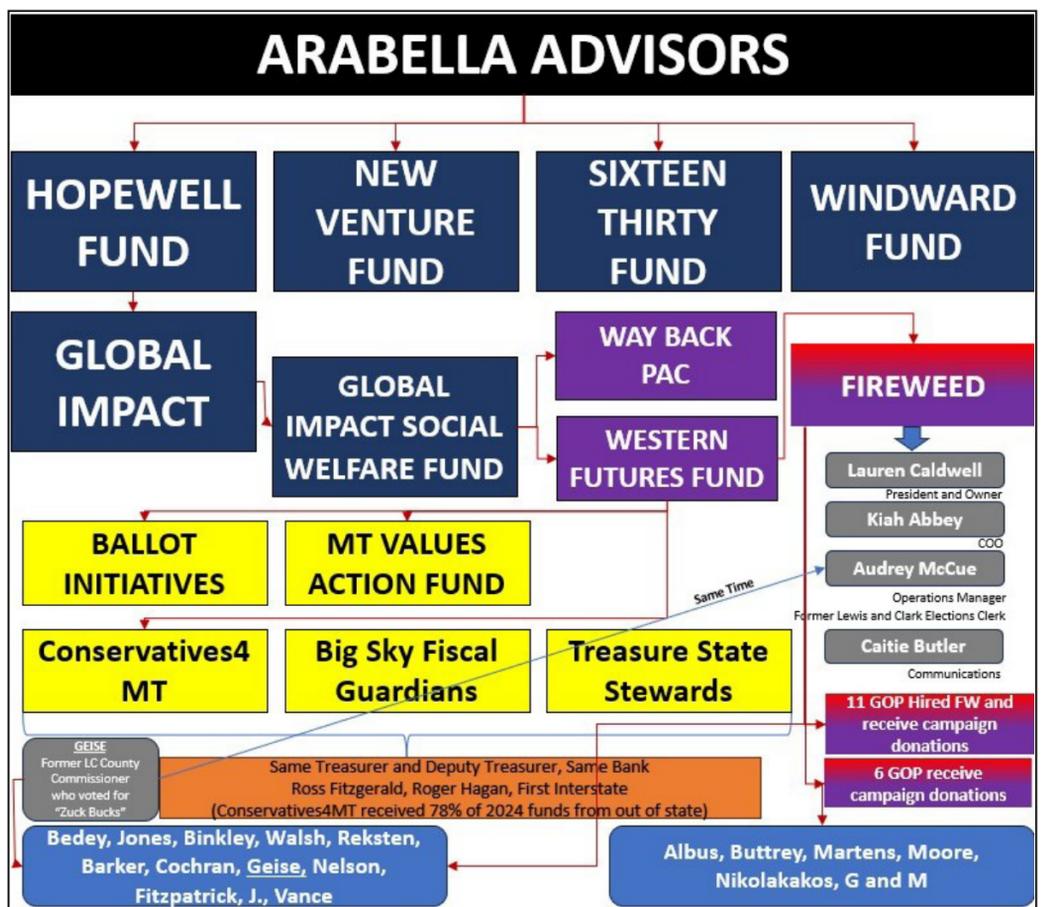
### The National Pipeline

The Arabella Advisors network is the largest dark money infrastructure in the United States, with roughly \$5 billion in total revenue between 2019 and 2022 flowing through four managed nonprofits: the Hopewell Fund, New Venture Fund, Sixteen Thirty Fund, and Windward Fund. Major institutional funders include the Berger Action Fund (Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss, the largest identified donor), the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation (\$27 million to Hopewell Fund in 2018 alone), the Open Society Foundations, and others. In November 2025, Arabella rebranded as Sunflower Services; its operations remain functionally unchanged.

Tax filings trace a specific pipeline from this network into Montana. The Hopewell Fund granted \$18.4 million to Global Impact of Alexandria, Virginia (Form 990, Schedule I). Global Impact's 501(c)(4) subsidiary, the Global Impact Social Welfare Fund (GISWF), then pushed money into Montana through two branches: \$2 million to the Western Futures Fund (a Wyoming 501(c)(4) with no donor disclosure), and \$500,000 to Way Back PAC (also Wyoming-based). Western Futures Fund also fed \$150,000 to Way Back PAC, meaning both branches draw from the same upstream source. This pipeline has been active for at least two election cycles, with Western Futures Fund contributing \$100,000 to Montana Values Action Fund as far back as 2022.

### Fireweed Campaigns Inc.

Fireweed Campaigns Inc. is a Helena-based political consulting firm registered at PO



Box 87, Helena, MT 59624 (MT SOS File No. D1414685). Its stated business purpose is "General Consulting Services for Campaigns and Organizations." Western Futures Fund's IRS Form 990 lists Fireweed as an independent contractor that received \$107,500 for "Project Management."

### Who Runs Fireweed

**Lauren Caldwell** — President and Owner. Caldwell has served as Political Director of the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), where she works on campaigns from school mill levies to candidate elections and serves on MFPE's legislative lobby team. A March 2026 op-ed by Rep. Amy Regier (R-Kalispell), published in the Flathead Beacon and Whitefish Pilot, described Fireweed as "a firm run by the political director of the teachers union and former executive director of the Montana Democratic Party."

**Kiah Abbey** — Chief Operating Officer. Abbey has served as Board Treasurer of the Montana Abortion Access Program since 2014 (12 years). She is the former Montana Voices Program Director at the Western Organization

of Resource Councils (grassroots organizing) and former Secretary of the Missoula Tenants Union. She also operates Marigold Creative Strategies LLC and signed Fireweed's 2026 annual report.

**Audrey McCue** — Operations Manager. McCue served for years as the Elections Supervisor of Lewis and Clark County, overseeing all elections in the Helena area. In October 2020, the Lewis and Clark County Commission voted to accept \$215,000 from the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL)—the nonprofit funded with \$350 million from Mark Zuckerberg. McCue's office was the direct recipient. She has since transitioned from administering elections to working for a political consulting firm funded through out-of-state dark money.

**Caitie Butler** — Communications Strategist. Butler's LinkedIn profile reveals she currently serves as Spokesperson & Communications for Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts (August 2025–present)—the committee that shares PO Box 87 with Fireweed and has paid Fireweed \$126,299 for management. Previously, she was Director of Communications for Montanans for Election Reform (January 2024–August 2025)—the ranked-choice voting initiative funded almost entirely by Unite America PAC (\$2.18 million) and managed by Fireweed (\$132,619 in retainers). Butler moved directly from one Fireweed-managed, out-of-state-funded committee to the next.

### Fireweed's Progressive Committee Portfolio

Fireweed has been paid by a series of progressive ballot initiative campaigns and political committees, many funded by the same out-of-state network - see table 1.

These committees promoted ranked-choice voting, nonpartisan judicial elections, reproductive rights ballot measures, school levies, and labor-aligned causes. The same firm that managed these progressive campaigns is now running Republican primary candidates.

### The Tutvedt PAC Web

Bruce Tutvedt, a former state legislator from Kalispell, sits at the center of an interlocking network of political committees. Montana Secretary of State filings (2025 annual report, File No. D1377218) show Tutvedt as President of Montanans for Election Reform Action Fund—the group that received \$2.18 million from Unite America PAC and paid Fireweed \$132,619. He is also a Director and Registered Agent of Big Sky Fiscal Guardians, and the largest individual Montana donor (\$25,000) to Conservatives4MT.



Table 1

Committee	Paid to FW	Primary Funder
MT Election Reform Action Fund	\$132,619	Unite America PAC (\$2.18M)
MT for Nonpartisan Courts (shares PO Box 87)	\$126,299	GISWF-MT (\$100K), WFF (\$10K)
Montanans Decide	\$46,225	TBD
Yes! For Helena Schools	\$17,430	MT Values Action Fund (\$7K)
Forward Montana	\$6,525	—
MT State AFL-CIO	\$3,500	—

(continued on page 13B)



Table 2: Group A: Candidates With Fireweed Donations AND Paid Fireweed Services

Candidate (Office)	FW Staff \$	Way Back	Paid to FW	Purple Snow
Bedey, David* (SD 43)	\$1,880	\$470	\$10,567	\$1,514
Jones, Llew* (SD 9)	\$1,880	\$470	\$8,932	—
Binkley, Michele* (HD 85)	\$1,880	\$470	\$6,416	—
Walsh, Kenneth* (HD 69)	\$1,880	\$470	\$6,416	\$360
Reksten, Linda* (HD 13)	\$1,410	\$470	\$5,851	—
Barker, Brad (HD 55)	\$1,880	—	\$5,535	\$1,360
Cochran, Curtis* (HD 90)	\$1,880	\$470	\$3,761	—
Geise, Susan* (HD 17)	\$1,880	\$470	\$2,516	—
Nelson, Russell* (HD 67)	\$1,410	\$470	\$2,143	\$1,526
Fitzpatrick, John (HD 76)	\$940	—	\$2,129	—
<b>TOTALS (10 candidates)</b>	<b>\$16,920</b>	<b>\$3,760</b>	<b>\$54,267</b>	<b>\$4,760</b>

\* = also received Way Back PAC contribution. Purple Snow Promotional (Billings) is associated with Hans Abbey, Kiah Abbey's relative, who separately donated \$459 to Bedey.

Table 3: Group B: Candidates With Fireweed Donations Only

Candidate (Office)	FW Staff \$	Way Back
Albus, Eric (SD 14)	\$470	—
Buttrey, Ed (SD 11)	\$470	—
Martens, Doug (SD 18)	\$470	—
Moore, Valerie (HD 29)	\$940	—
Nikolakakos, George (SD 12)	\$940	—
Nikolakakos, Melissa (HD 20)	\$940	—
<b>TOTALS (6 candidates)</b>	<b>\$4,230</b>	<b>—</b>

**DARK MONEY (from page 12B)**

Three political committees—Conservatives4MT, Big Sky Fiscal Guardians, and Treasure State Stewards—share identical infrastructure per COPP and SOS filings: the same Treasurer (Ross Fitzgerald), the same Deputy Treasurer (Roger Hagan), the same bank (First Interstate Bank), and overlapping Helena P.O. Boxes. Big Sky Fiscal Guardians and Treasure State Stewards were both registered on the same day (01/30/2026) with

identical officers. Both filings were signed by Hagan.

Ted Kronebusch serves as a Director of both Montanans for Election Reform Action Fund (Tutvedt's group) and Treasure State Stewards (one of the new PACs), directly linking the Unite America-funded election reform operation to the new PAC infrastructure. The registered agent email for Montanans for Election Reform is sean@treasurestatetax.

com—sharing the “Treasure State” name with Treasure State Stewards.

Conservatives4MT spent approximately \$360,000 in the 2024 primary. Of its \$422,579 in total contributions, 78% (\$330,000) came from out-of-state committees: WPLN Action (\$100,000, funded by Pivotal Ventures/Melinda French Gates), Guarantee PAC (\$80,000, funded by Way Back PAC), Unite

(continued on page 14B)



**DARK MONEY (from page 13B)**

America PAC (\$75,000), and MHA PAC (\$75,000). Several candidates supported by Conservatives4MT expenditures in 2024 simultaneously received paid campaign management from Fireweed. Llew Jones has a documented long relationship with Tutvedt.

**The 2026 Republican Primary Operation**

Montana COPP filings from January through March 2026 reveal a systematic pattern: Fireweed staff make coordinated maximum contributions (\$470 each) to a specific slate of Republican primary candidates, while Fireweed simultaneously provides those candidates with paid campaign management. Way Back PAC independently contributes to many of the same candidates.

Fireweed's standard billing includes a monthly campaign management fee (typically \$3,000) and compliance services (typically \$900). The largest Fireweed expenditures are from Bedey (\$10,567, including billboard placements), Jones (\$8,932, including a digital media buy), Binkley (\$6,416), and Walsh (\$6,416). Fireweed staff donated \$16,920 to these candidates while those candidates paid Fireweed \$54,267 for services—a 3:1 ratio in Fireweed's favor.

Across all sixteen candidates, Fireweed staff contributed \$21,150 in personal donations and Way Back PAC contributed \$3,760. All figures are Fireweed-specific, calculated from individual COPP filings.

**Notable Connections**

Susan Geise (HD 17) is the former Lewis and Clark County Commissioner who endorsed accepting the \$215,000 CTCL (Zuckerberg) grant in 2020—the grant administered by Audrey McCue. Geise is now receiving coordinated Fireweed staff donations, a Way Back PAC contribution, and paid Fireweed campaign services.

Michele Binkley (HD 85) was a Fireweed campaign management client in 2024 (\$8,004 for primary services). She is now running again and receiving coordinated donations from the same staff who managed her last campaign.

Llew Jones (SD 9) has a long relationship with Tutvedt and is receiving the largest Fireweed-managed expenditures (\$8,932) of any candidate in the current cycle, plus Way Back PAC support.

**The Convergence**

The documented record establishes that a single integrated funding network—originating with the Arabella Advisors infrastructure and flowing through Wyoming intermediaries—simultaneously funds progressive ballot initiatives in Montana, pays a political consulting firm run by Democratic and union-aligned operatives to manage those initiatives, and then uses that same firm plus coordinated PAC contributions to support selected Republican primary candidates.

The candidates supported by this network have had outsized influence on issues aligned with the network's interests, including school funding and union priorities advanced by MFPE (where Fireweed's president has served as Political Director), and the defeat of partisan judicial selection legislation—directly benefiting Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts, the committee that shares Fireweed's mailing address and pays Fireweed \$17,000 per month.

The result is that out-of-state progressive dark money—originating with some of the wealthiest foundations in the country and laundered through a chain of intermediaries designed to obscure its origins—is being used to influence which Republicans Montana voters can choose from in their primary elections.

*This article is limited to facts established by source records. It does not allege illegality or draw legal conclusions. All amounts and dates are as reported in the cited filings. Additional filings may expand this analysis.*

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Here are the receipts, you decide who these candidates answer to.

Here is the report on Fireweed donating to Republican candidates, and some of those candidates hiring Fireweed. Seventeen Republican candidates received donations from Fireweed Campaigns. Eleven of those candidates hired Fireweed. Note the monthly fees associated with hiring them. There are two Abbeys listed as donors, Hans and Kiah. Hans is from Billings and runs Purple Snow Promotions, and Kiah is from Helena and works at Fireweed. They are family.

Connected to this donation stream is a board member of the Montana Free Press, Anne Avis. She donated to 11 of the candidates listed in the spreadsheet. (Barker, Bedey, Binkley, Cochran, Geise, Jones, Nikolakakos G and M, Reksten, Vance, Walsh). The Montana Free Press was listed in previous Montana Sentinel work. This stated fact does imply anything criminal, only that the candidates and funding streams that continue to appear in our research lead to dark money leftist sources, and voters deserve answers when wondering who these politicians answer to. The two articles below list the previous work that Fireweed employees have engaged in, including public-sector union work and county election clerk work. The third article is about ballot initiative funding and is written by Montanans for Limited Government. 🇺🇸

(A) Name and title	(B) Average hours per week (list any hours for related organizations below dotted line)	(C) Position (do not check more than one box, unless person is both an officer and a director/trustee)					(D) Reportable compensation from the organization (W-2/1099-MISC/1099-NEC)	(E) Reportable compensation from related organizations (W-2/1099-MISC/1099-NEC)	(F) Estimated amount of other compensation from the organization and related organizations
		Individual trustee or director	Institutional Trustee;	Officer	Key employee	Highest compensated employee			
(1) JOHN ADAMS ..... Executive Dir.	40.00 ..... 0.00			X			96,622	0	13,664
(2) MARK HUBER ..... Treasurer	1.00 ..... 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(3) HEATHER DIETRICK ..... Director	1.00 ..... 0.00	X					0	0	0
(4) ANNE AVIS ..... Director	1.00 ..... 0.00	X					0	0	0
(5) SUSAN FOX ..... Director	1.00 ..... 0.00	X					0	0	0
(6) SKYLAR BROWNING ..... President	1.00 ..... 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(7) ALEXIS BONOGOFSKY ..... Secretary	1.00 ..... 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(8) TRESA SMITH ..... Director	1.00 ..... 0.00	X					0	0	0

Here is the latest IRS-900 showing Avis as a Montana Free Press board member.





# MONTANA'S DATA CENTER BOOM

## Promise or Peril for Power, Water, and Communities?

By Renee Pirtz

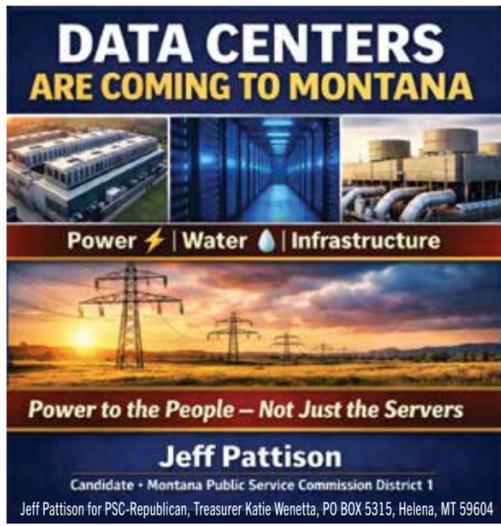
As artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and global tech demand surge, Montana has unexpectedly become a hotspot for hyperscale data centers. Vast open land, naturally cool nights, and access to long-haul fiber optics have drawn major developers scouting the Mountain West. But with proposals accelerating—NorthWestern Energy in talks with at least 11 entities, including signed letters of intent or agreements with companies like Quantica Infrastructure (planning up to 1,000 MW south of Broadview), Sabey Data Centers (250 MW west of Butte), and Atlas Power Group (150 MW expansion in Butte)—Montanans are asking hard questions: Who really benefits, and at what cost to our grid, water, and way of life?

One of the most consequential proposals now driving public concern is the massive **5,000-acre data center planned south of Broadview in Yellowstone County**, led by Quantica Infrastructure through its Big Sky Digital Infrastructure platform. According to reporting from the *Billings Gazette*, NorthWestern Energy has issued a **non-binding letter of intent to supply up to 1,000 MW of electricity** to the project—an extraordinary amount equal to roughly two-thirds of the power NorthWestern currently owns.

At a recent public forum in Billings, hydrologists, environmental experts, and local residents raised concerns about the project's potential water use, noting that a facility of this scale could require **millions of gallons of water per day for cooling. A data center of this scale would use between 1–5 million gallons of water per day — the equivalent of a city of 10,000 to 40,000 people. That's more water than many rural communities, including Broadview, use in total.** Others questioned the strain such a load would place on Montana's already-constrained grid, and whether ratepayers could ultimately be saddled with the cost of transmission upgrades needed to serve a single industrial customer.

**The Montana Environmental Information Center notes that the Broadview project would be the largest proposed data center in the state, with power demand rivaling that of a major metropolitan area. The organization warns that such a facility could reshape regional energy planning for decades.**

Data centers are power hogs. A single hyperscale campus can demand as much electricity as a small city, and Montana's grid—already stretched—isn't fully equipped. Transmission lines near capacity, new load



requests outstripping supply, and upgrades potentially costing hundreds of millions raise a core issue: Who foots the bill? In many states, these infrastructure costs get passed to everyday ratepayers, not the tech giants driving the demand.

Jeff Pattison, a third-generation farmer and rancher from Glasgow running for Montana Public Service Commission District 1, sees the stakes clearly. The PSC regulates utilities like NorthWestern Energy and has authority over large-load approvals, ensuring new industrial users don't harm existing customers.

“Are data centers going to power Montana or consume our power. The real question is: will they power Montana's future... or consume the power and water our communities depend on?” Pattison said. “Data centers bring investment and innovation, but they also bring massive demand for electricity and water. As a third-generation farmer and rancher, I know these resources aren't abstract policy ideas—they're the backbone of our farms, ranches, and communities.”

One promising solution Pattison proposes to ease grid strain without massive new construction is reconductoring existing transmission lines with advanced conductors, such as Aluminum Conductor Composite Core (ACCC) conductors. These use a lightweight carbon-fiber composite core instead of traditional steel, allowing far less thermal expansion (and thus minimal sag) when lines heat up under heavy loads. This enables roughly double the current-carrying capacity (ampacity) compared to equivalent-diameter steel-core conductors like ACSR, while reducing line losses by up to 25% or more through greater aluminum content and efficiency. For Montana's constrained grid, ACCC could unlock significant hidden capacity on existing rights-of-way—helping accommodate data center loads or other growth without building entirely new lines, towers, or corridors. It also cuts energy waste, lowers long-term costs through reduced losses, and improves resilience against high-demand scenarios.

Despite these advantages, utilities have often been reluctant to adopt ACCC and similar advanced conductors widely. Reasons include higher upfront costs (typically 1.5–3 times more than traditional options), concerns over installation complexity and potential damage to the composite core if mishandled (though Pattison shares that newer designs like InfoCore help verify integrity), limited long-term field data in diverse conditions, and a conservative industry preference for proven technologies with decades of track record.

In the Northwest, adoption remains limited—not because the technology lacks benefits, but because many utilities are still unfamiliar with modern composite-core conductors and how they change project economics. When utilities evaluate only the per-foot conductor price, they often overlook the immediate infrastructure savings that ACCC and similar composite-core systems create through reduced sag, lighter weight, and lower structural loading. These engineering advantages can reduce tower height, shrink foundation size, and cut steel requirements, making advanced conductors competitive or even more affordable on a total-project basis.

Water adds another layer of worry in drought-prone Montana. Most large facilities rely on evaporative cooling, guzzling millions of gallons daily—competing with agriculture, municipalities, and slow-recharging aquifers. Hydrologists warn that industrial-scale use could push regions toward long-term scarcity, especially as drought cycles intensify.

The jobs pitch often falls flat too. Developers tout economic growth, but a typical hyperscale site creates only 20–50 permanent positions—mostly specialized roles like network engineers or high-voltage technicians, rarely filled locally. Construction brings temporary workers from out-of-state, leaving minimal lasting impact compared to the public resources required.

Then there are the everyday nuisances: Backup diesel generators (dozens per site) produce noise, exhaust, and vibrations during tests or outages. Cooling towers and chillers hum constantly, while 24/7 security lighting creates light pollution—disruptions that hit hard in quiet rural communities.

Gov. Greg Gianforte has actively promoted Montana as a data center destination, highlighting our advantages in land, climate, and fiber to attract high-tech investment and diversify the economy. Supporters see tax revenue and prestige. Critics, however, point to generous incentives wiping out much of that revenue, public burdens for power and water, minimal jobs, and lasting environmental strain.

Pattison emphasized protection for Montanans first: “If elected to the Montana Public Service Commission, my priority will remain simple: Power to the People. That means making sure Montana families and businesses are protected first—and that large industrial users pay their fair share for the infrastructure they require. I'm not a career politician. I'm a citizen advocate and statesman who believes the people paying the bills deserve a voice. And when it comes to Montana's power and resources... The people come first.”

Recent developments underscore the urgency. NorthWestern has preliminary deals for up to 1,400 MW combined by 2030—enough to power hundreds of thousands of homes—while groups like environmental coalitions petition the PSC for safeguards, including separate rate classes for large loads to prevent cost-shifting to households. Some proposals have stalled (e.g., a Great Falls campus), but others advance amid calls for transparency on water use, emissions, and ratepayer impacts.

Montana faces no easy path forward. Balancing economic diversification with reliable, affordable power and water for residents, farmers, and small businesses will define the debate. As more proposals emerge, communities demand answers: How much power and water? Who pays? What protections exist?

The answers will shape whether data centers become a boon—or a burden—for the Treasure State. 🗳️

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