

# A Bucket of Water and a Bar of Gold

**By Jeff Pattison, Republican candidate  
for Montana Public Service Commission**

I have often said that when you truly need it, I would rather have a bucket of water than a bar of gold.

That may sound like a simple observation from a Montana farmer and rancher, but it expresses something deeper about how I believe government should work. We must understand the difference between what is valuable and what is essential.

Water is essential. Reliable electricity is essential. Affordable heat in a Montana winter is essential. Telephone and broadband services that connect rural families, businesses and emergency responders are essential.

The Public Service Commission exists because most utility customers cannot shop around for another provider. That places a serious responsibility on commissioners to ensure monopoly utilities receive a reasonable opportunity to operate successfully—but never a blank check at the expense of captive ratepayers.

My governing philosophy begins with a simple principle: the people who create a cost should pay that cost, and those who receive the benefit should carry their fair share of the risk.

That principle is increasingly important as Montana considers data centers and other enormous industrial loads. Economic development can create opportunity, but Montana families, farmers, ranchers and small businesses should not pay higher utility bills for infrastructure built primarily to benefit somebody else. Nor should ratepayers be left holding the bag if a project closes, relocates or fails.

Large projects may require new generation, transmission lines, substations and other expensive infrastructure. Before existing ratepayers are exposed, Montana should consider appropriate financial guarantees,

bonding and decommissioning requirements. If a development creates the demand, its owners—not ordinary ratepayers—should bear the resulting costs and long-term risks.

That is not anti-development. It is responsible development.

We should also demand more from the infrastructure we already have.

Utility efficiency is not glamorous, but energy saved through improved transmission, reduced line loss and updated technology is energy that does not have to be generated and paid for again. Montana should examine advanced conductors, grid modernization and other innovations that can increase capacity, improve reliability and reduce wildfire risk.

At the same time, we must remain open to new generation. Montana needs dependable power when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining. Coal, natural gas and hydropower remain important, while advanced nuclear, improved storage and emerging technologies may become part of our future. We should evaluate each option honestly—without ideological blinders—and ask whether it is safe, reliable, affordable and suitable for Montana.

A commissioner must also recognize the limits of the office. The Legislature establishes the laws and sideboards under which the PSC operates. The commission then applies those laws to individual cases based upon the evidence. Commissioners should communicate clearly with legislators when laws need clarification, while preserving the independence required in matters that may come before the commission.

Cooperation should extend to Montana's electric and telephone cooperatives. Although electric cooperatives generally fall outside the PSC's rate-setting authority, they serve many of the same Montana families and face many of the same questions about reliability, affordability, transmission and future growth. I would like to establish a regular forum where

cooperatives, regulated utilities, consumer advocates, legislators and the public can identify challenges before they become crises.

Transparency must be more than a slogan. Montanans deserve understandable information, meaningful opportunities to participate and commissioners willing to explain their reasoning. Not every decision will please everyone, but people should never feel that decisions affecting their homes and livelihoods were made before their voices were heard.

My faith teaches me that leadership is stewardship. Public office does not belong to the person occupying it; it is a temporary trust given by the people. A commissioner should therefore arrive prepared, listen carefully, ask difficult questions and remember who ultimately pays the bill.

No commissioner should pretend to have every answer. Good decisions require preparation, sound evidence and the humility to listen. But I know the questions I will carry into every decision:

Will this keep service safe and reliable? Is it fair to existing customers? Who receives the benefit? Who carries the risk? And will this decision leave Montana stronger for our children and grandchildren?

Montana can welcome opportunity without surrendering the essentials that sustain us. Gold may attract attention, but when the well runs dry, we remember what is truly valuable.

Sometimes the soundest public policy begins with something as simple as a bucket of water.

Jeff Pattison

Republican candidate for Montana Public  
Service Commission, District 1

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**JEFF PATTISON**

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER DISTRICT #1**

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