



Platform

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INTRODUCTION

Montanans 55 and older need a strong voice to bring their priorities to the forefront of the political arena. Big Sky 55+ is an organization that advocates for public policies that make a difference in our lives and the lives of future generations.

Many people in Montana feel they can't afford to retire, and yet the majority party in Congress and even in our own state legislature is promoting an agenda to do away with the services people need as they get older. Simple truth, if Social Security and Medicare are cut, millions of us will have re-think when, how and, if we can retire. They enact tax cuts benefiting the wealthiest Americans while burdening the rest of us with debt. Social Security and Medicare prevent millions of people, particularly the elderly, from falling into poverty.

We must let our leaders know we want a future in which people can retire without worrying about whether they have enough money to keep a roof over their heads or food on the table. We want a future that allows young people to pursue education without crippling debt. We want all Montanans to have access to quality affordable health care whether they live on a farm, in a city, or on a reservation. And, we want a future that keeps Montana's constitutional promise of a clean and healthful environment.

The members of Big Sky 55+ know that political battles are not for the faint of heart. And, we also know that the laws and budgets we pass at the local, state, and national level reflect priorities. For too long the focus has been on helping the rich get richer while the rest of us foot the bill predicated on faulty, disproven trickle down economic theory. Big Sky 55+ believes that our priorities should be focused instead on building a better future for Montanans today and tomorrow.

This platform is our first list of issues we believe are important to shaping the future character of Montana. It serves as a living document. The principles will help guide our future policy, electoral, and accountability work. What follows is an analysis of how we got where we are today, and how we plan to build a future for Montana.

BACKGROUND: HOW WE GOT HERE, WHERE WE ARE, AND A NEW WAY FORWARD

The United States emerged out of the 1930s economic depression with national and state governments implementing a series of policies inspired by the philosophy of a political economist named John Maynard Keynes. Keynes believed in the power of markets to be the driving engine of the economy. However, he also recognized the essential importance of government policies to augment and regulate those markets so that the majority of the population benefited. This included a progressive taxation system, in which wealthier individuals and large businesses paid their fair share. From the 1940s into the 1970s, there was a bipartisan consensus in support of Keynesianism: Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon and others were all Keynesians as were most legislators. During the 1970s this system ran into trouble and the momentum of policy began to move in the direction advocated by neoliberal economists such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and James M. Buchanan. Neoliberal policies include a taxation system and spending priorities unfairly favoring the interests of wealthy individuals and large corporations over the majority of taxpayers. It also redirects government spending away from the provision of adequate social safety net programs and reasonable environmental protections.

Neoliberals attack the very idea of a politics whose foundation is a society infused with collective responsibilities to each other, the natural environment, and future generations. Their alternative vision is a collection of free and responsible individuals. This might sound good but the problem is that the policies advocated by neoliberals - privatization of public services, deregulation, and regressive tax cuts - results in growing economic, social, and political inequality. The negative effects of neoliberalism fall disproportionately on low and medium level wage earners, those on fixed incomes, people of color, and women. Neoliberal deregulation means that we fail to uphold our collective responsibility to protect the natural environment for future generations.

The core mission of Big Sky 55 + is to organize Montana citizens 55 and older to have a strong and mature voice that advocates for the legitimate interests of older

Montanans without sacrificing the interests of younger Montanans and the natural environment that supports us all. Big Sky 55 + embraces and advocates for a vision in a new and better direction that works better for the majority of Montanans recognizing that neoliberalism has hurt. Our vision includes policy reforms that generate government actions that effectively bolster markets and provide adequate public services in the 21st century.

A significant fact about the Montana electorate is that the majority of people who vote in our state are aged 55 and above. This gives us a significant opportunity to make change for the better if we can motivate ourselves to vote, effectively pressure and assist elected officials to pass sound public policies as well as encouraging more of us to actually run for office, most notably for our citizen legislature. We are fond of saying at Big Sky 55 + that all of us older Montanans become seniors by virtue of simply living long enough but we only become elders if we direct our energies toward taking good care of ourselves and others in both our private and public lives.

Virtually all Montanans are either seniors ourselves, can see old age on the horizon, or know somebody who is. Once upon a time, back in the Keynesian era, decent pensions supplemented by Social Security and Medicare were not uncommon. Neoliberalism systematically stripped many of those guarantees away and we have collectively suffered as a result. When our elders cannot take care of themselves in retirement then the burden passes to family members. We are not saying that families should not pitch in and help, but as most of us can attest, without adequate and smart public services, we all unnecessarily suffer as a result.

This platform summarizes a list of issues and policy directions that can orient us toward a better future. Many of the programs we advocate cost money but this is money we can raise if we redirect current spending combined with a more balanced and fair system. This document will be supplemented by a more detailed proposal that will flesh out these ideas in more detail, provide fiscal notes where appropriate, and offer a detailed tax policy that explains how this can be paid for in ways that will not undercut the vitality of our state-wide economy. We hope that you will join us to make this vision a reality

PROTECTING AND EXPANDING SOCIAL SECURITY, MEDICARE, AND MEDICAID

Our state and nation face a health care and long-term care crisis that affects people of all ages and strains our economy. Seniors do not receive the long-term care they need because it is unaffordable. These costs lead to significant financial stress on millions of families, especially those in the “sandwich generation”— one in seven adults — who are not only providing care to children but also to their aging parents. And while community-based care provides a less costly option than institutionalization and allows people to live independently with dignity, there are still significant barriers that make it difficult for people to remain in their communities, namely, a lack of access to affordable care delivered by a well-qualified and well-paid workforce.

Medicare and Medicaid, cornerstones of our healthcare system. For over 50 years, Medicaid has provided vital health insurance protections to seniors in nursing homes and low-income Americans of all ages. Medicaid and Medicare are especially important in Montana, which is aging at a faster rate than most of the other States in the Union. The 2010 U.S. Census showed that Montana’s 65 and older population was at 13.4% while the United States is at 12.1%. In Montana, Medicaid expansion efforts since 2015 have helped 100,000 Montanans.

Preserve and Protect Social Security. Without Social Security, the elderly poverty rate in Montana would go from 7.1% to 41.8%. We need to protect Social Security as a vital service we all deserve. In Montana, Social Security provides benefits to over 227,000 Montanans. Social Security is earned by over 159,000 Montanans aged 65 and these hard-earned benefits keep people out of poverty.

Improve Access to Healthcare and Long-Term Care. Medicare insures more than 227,000 Montanans, half of whom live on incomes below \$23,500 per year. While Medicare is essential, the plan doesn't do enough. There are gaps in Medicare's coverage including basic dental, hearing, and vision, preventive services that aging people need to live healthy and productive lives. People on Medicare now spend on average 15% of their income on health coverage, which is three times more than younger households spend for health coverage.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support I-185, Healthy Montana Campaign, which contains long-term care services that help seniors and people with disabilities live independently and remain in their homes.
- Oppose efforts to defund or weaken Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.
- Support efforts to advocate for and create long term care services, and publicly funded home and community-based care where and when needed.

ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR ALL

We must prepare for the future by supporting economic policy that works for all our working families throughout their lifespan. If we want an economy that works for everyone, it's time to strengthen access to quality healthcare, retirement security, affordable housing and get serious about protecting our environment.

Require Corporations and the Elite to Pay their Fair Share

Corporations continue to make record profits, yet far too many of them pay nothing in federal income tax. Meanwhile, the top one percent continues to expand its piece of the economic pie, while often paying lower tax rates than working families.

Expand Retirement Security

Social Security benefits play a vital role in reducing poverty. Without Social Security, 22.2 million more Americans would be poor, and 44 percent of elderly Americans would have income levels below the official poverty line. Seventy-five million working Americans do not have a retirement plan, and half of all Americans have less than \$10,000 in savings. We need a comprehensive approach to ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, geography, gender, race, or vocation has a guaranteed opportunity to retire with a secure income that will allow them to live out their lives with dignity and independence.

Supporting Workers' Rights to Raise Wages and Improve Workplace Standards

An economy that works for everyone must be one that raises wages and ensures that everyone who works full time can support themselves and his or her family. When workers come together and have a voice

at work, they have the power to improve their wages and benefits and ensure they are treated with dignity on the job. Our current labor laws do not support workers who want to form a union. It's time we reform laws to protect workers who want to bargain collectively for better pay and better working conditions. We need to support new ways for workers to form organizations that can raise wages across the economy.

Support the Fight for \$15 and minimum wage initiatives.

The Fight for \$15 movement has galvanized workers across the country who are working hard and struggling to get by every day. Thousands of workers, from fast food workers to child care teachers to home care providers, have joined strikes and other actions to win \$15/hour and union rights. Their courage has helped focus the country on the crisis of underpaid work.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support and protect union pensions and retirement security through a worker's lifetime.
- Support collective bargaining agreements and workers' rights to organize and all efforts to raise the minimum wage and benefits such as; parental and sick leave.
- Oppose all Right to Work legislation, including any and all anti-worker legislation that unfairly favors corporations over workers.

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

It is time health care is treated as a basic human right in the United States, as it is in nearly every other advanced democracy. All people deserve access to quality affordable health care regardless of where they live. We support policies like Medicare for All and expansion of Medicaid that would provide affordable coverage for more Montanans. Many people 55 and older feel that they are one illness or accident away from bankruptcy. People should not have to choose between skyrocketing insurance prices or going without needed care.

If we want healthy thriving communities, we need to prioritize the health of our citizenry. Our current healthcare system is broken. The emphasis is on the cost of insurance rather than the care of the patient. When people feel they can't afford to go to the doctor, their illnesses are often diagnosed later, are less treatable and result in higher costs than if they were able to get preventive care or early treatment. Quality affordable health care helps individuals and families access essential primary care, needed specialists, and preventive care.

Rural Montanans face another crisis with the potential loss of rural hospitals, clinics and access to long-term care. Additionally, those age 55 and older are often managing the care of their aging parents. Increasing access to health care includes funding rural hospitals, maximizing the use of telemedicine, extending veterans' health services, making Indian Health Care Services portable so Native Americans can access health care regardless of where they live.

According to the Montana Budget and Policy Center, 2017 state budget cuts have resulted in a loss of services for our most vulnerable populations. The cuts include:

- I. A combined loss of nearly \$32 million in targeted case management for children and adults with developmental disabilities and those experiencing mental health and substance use disorders.
- II. Nearly \$12 million to in-home care for seniors and people with disabilities living in their own homes, likely forcing more Montanans into nursing home care.
- III. \$22.6 million in reimbursement rates for hospitals and other health centers providing care to Medicaid patients.
- IV. Ending Medicaid's coverage for some dental services, including denture services.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support I-185, Healthy Montana, to keep nearly 100,000 Montanans from losing Medicaid coverage, supports long term care for seniors and people with disabilities to live independently and remain in their homes, suicide prevention for veterans, and other needed health care services.
- Support expanding Medicare to cover people 55 and older.
- Support efforts to develop a single-payer health care system to take insurance companies out of our health care.
- Support measures to expand access to telemedicine and expanded broadband internet to rural Montana areas.
- Oppose privatization of veteran health care services.
- Support efforts to reduce disparities in Native American health. (See *Native Equity in Montana position statement*).

Providing Quality Education for All

Early Childhood through Higher Adult Education

“(1) It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.” (Montana Constitution. Part X. Education and Public Lands Section 1)

As seniors, we recognize that a quality public educational system from early childhood through higher education, with adequate funding, is necessary for building strong families, strong communities, and our state. Educational achievement opens doors and increases opportunities for success and helps level the playing field. We need to prepare all students to succeed in the new global economic systems and help them build our state.

Because of funding cuts by the state, we have seen an unfair shift in responsibility in K-12 school funding from the state to local taxpayers who are being asked to support our schools with additional revenues to meet basic school operational needs. Big Sky 55+ recognizes:

- I. A strong public-school system from early childhood through adult/higher education that provides all children, regardless of gender, race, economic status, and those with special needs with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to participate equally in our economic systems.
- II. We need to eliminate the educational disparities and inequities in our educational achievement, including children in poverty, minorities, and children with special needs.
- III. Educators must be provided with wages that are equitable to other professions, including the benefits that will enable our teachers to have economic security.

IV. Post-secondary education is vital for economic family security and we must make college and vocational training accessible and affordable for all students including:

- Tuition free programs to provide “access for all” regardless of economic status.
- Stop burdening students with mountains of debt.
- Alternative Post-Secondary public education strategies – Internships, on-line, etc.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support school funding to meet our constitutional responsibilities for all public schools both rural and urban, regardless of zip code.
- Support efforts and funding to reduce disparities in school achievement.
- Support efforts in reducing the costs of higher education, reduce student debt, and seek tuition free options to allow access for all students.
- Support our teachers in quality pay and benefits.
- Support state funding for tribal colleges.
- Support the 6-mill levy campaign for higher education, I-128.

PROTECTING AND DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

We recognize that powerful forces in the United States are actively manipulating the electoral and legislative processes by disenfranchising citizens, controlling election rules, and dominating paid media.

Montana has a relatively high voter turnout. In presidential elections turnout usually hovers around 75% and in off presidential years around 55%, higher than most other states. We recognize that specific areas, particularly reservations and low income neighborhoods, generally participate at lower levels than the rest of the state. Special efforts should be made to increase voter participation in those areas. We believe that our electoral system has been corrupted. We believe in the concept of one person, one vote. We believe that money and the power of lobbyists have corrupted our legislative processes. This is particularly true here in Montana because our citizen lawmakers only meet once every two years. We believe term limits raise serious constitutional issues. The combination of term limits and bi-annual legislative sessions, means that term-limited citizen legislators are at a distinct disadvantage when dealing with professional, full-time lobbyists.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support registering as many eligible voters as possible and eliminate barriers to voting, including; conducting elections by mail-in ballots, providing polling stations in traditionally low turnout areas and providing election officials sufficient funding for conducting fair, efficient and accurate elections.
- Oppose prohibitive voter ID laws, intimidation or other forms of harassment, particularly targeted to non-English speakers and voters of color; displaying false or misleading signs about voter fraud and the criminal penalties related thereto; and spreading false information about voter requirements or the need to present certain types of photo identification where no such requirement exists.
- Oppose efforts to create barriers to voting and qualifying ballot measures.
- Support limiting the amount of money that can be spent in elections and limiting the time frame in which electioneering can occur.
- Support public funding of elections (which have already been adopted in 27 jurisdictions across the country).
- Support prohibiting corporations from participating in elections in any form.

- Support political parties delegate selection processes that are allocated by population and reflective of the popular vote in primaries.
- Support eliminating or curtailing the “super delegate” system for presidential nomination conventions.
- Support electing Presidents by popular vote and eliminating the Electoral College.
- Oppose partisan gerrymandering when re-apportioning political jurisdictions.
- Support expanding civics education in Montana public schools to assure our citizens have a solid grounding in democratic values and processes.

RIGHT TO A CLEAN AND HEALTHFUL ENVIRONMENT

Protect Our Environment

We believe it is our responsibility to leave our children, grandchildren, and future generations a “clean and healthful environment.” It is our constitutional right and our responsibility to pass our rich natural legacy of clean air and water and fertile lands on to future generations in excellent condition.

Working families, many of whom live in or near our major cities, disproportionately experience the toll of environmental injustices everyday—higher pollution levels and increased exposure to environmental hazards at home and at work. Sadly, as a result of climate change, our communities at home and abroad have also been destroyed by more frequent natural disasters. We must address the human and economic threats of environmental degradation while creating an economy that works for all.

Montanans are seeing the effects of climate change firsthand as our state turns into a tinderbox:

- Wildfire season in Montana is 2 1/2 months longer than it was in 1990.
- Fires cost Montana over \$60 million last year (not counting health impacts from smoke and the loss of cattle.)

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support protecting Montana's precious water, its lakes, rivers, and streams.
- Support increasing access to our public lands and assure they stay in public hands.
- Support and maintain our state and city parks.
- Support protecting special places like the Badger Two Medicine for future generations.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND RACIAL JUSTICE

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

We believe in promoting the dignity and empowerment of all people regardless of race, sex, gender, disability, income, and zip code and supports policies that promote shared power and justice for all.

Equal Pay for Equal Work Regardless of Race or Gender

Today, Women in Montana make \$.43 cents less on the dollar than men. And people of color make even less on the dollar. It's time to take measures to equalize our wages and services for people. We want to advance racial and economic equity in state and federal policy, influence legislation, provide a racial justice analysis, and promote the usage of racial equity messaging and framing within the progressive community while increasing the capacity of communities of color.

A Fair Justice System for All

We all want to be treated fairly in our justice systems (law enforcement, courts, and incarceration), yet statistics reflect a disproportionate representation of minorities and the poor in Montana's jails, judicial, and legal systems. For example, in Montana Native Americans make up about 7% of the total population, but account for more than 17% of those incarcerated. Continuing efforts are needed to ensure that our law enforcement and our judicial personnel insure that racial profiling is not a part of their decision making in traffic stops, arrests, and sentencing. In addition, we must ensure adequate legal representation for all who are unable to meet these costs.

LGBT Equality

LGBT Montanans and their families still face discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. We support city and statewide efforts to amend the Montana Human Rights Act and Montana's Bias-Based Crimes statute to protect people based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. These are often referred to as Nondiscrimination Ordinances (or NDOs).

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Oppose ballot measures and legislation which discriminate against people based on race, gender, religious beliefs, age, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, physical or mental disability political beliefs, or social condition in the areas of employment, housing, provision of public services, credit, insurance and public accommodation, government services and insurance.
- Oppose efforts to allow discrimination in any public service justified by a provider's personal beliefs.
- Oppose efforts to restrict or eliminate access to reproductive health care.

NATIVE AMERICAN EQUITY IN MONTANA

Native Americans have lived here for thousands of years, long before the state of Montana existed. 78,000 people of Native American heritage currently live in Montana, on the seven reservations as well as throughout our urban areas. It is a growing population. They make up 6.6% of the state's population and they make up 13.7% of the total student population in our public schools.

Each tribal nation has a proud history and unique cultural heritage and language. Each also has a legal relationship to the Federal Government based on a long history of treaties and various laws. The Government to Government relationship which recognizes the sovereignty of these tribal nations is the basis of the relationship with the Federal Government and the State of Montana.

Native American people face many challenges in their daily lives, both on and off reservation. Solutions can be found through cooperative efforts and support between the tribal nations and Federal, State and Local Government systems. The following are some of the challenges:

- 1) **Severe Health Care Disparities:** The Montana Health Care Foundation reports that American Indians in Montana die at a median age of 50 years (more than 20 years earlier than non-Indian Montanans). Death rates for specific illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, respiratory illnesses, injuries, and suicide are substantially higher as well.
- 2) For 2014 and 2015, the highest rate of suicide in Montana is among American Indians (35.5 per 100,000) followed by Caucasians (28.1 per 100,000) according to the Montana 2016 Suicide Mortality report.

- 3) Educational achievement is improving, but American Indian students face higher dropout rates, low graduation rates and lower achievement levels than their non-Indian peers.
- 4) American Indians have over representation in our prison and legal systems.
- 5) Violence against Indian women and missing American Indian women is a state and national issue.
- 6) Substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing are persistent problems.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support the sovereignty of Montana's tribal nations and the government to government relationship.
- Support the inclusion of American Indian history and culture in our K- higher education systems as outlined by our state's constitution and state statutes.
- Support increased access to health insurance, preventive and primary health care to reduce health care disparities.
- Support efforts to reduce the high rates of incarceration in our criminal justice systems.
- Support efforts to improve the social and economic well-being of Montana's Native American families both on and off reservation.
- Support increased participation in the political systems, including supporting progressive candidates and increased access to voting through satellite voting centers in our reservation communities.

STRENGTHENING MONTANA'S RURAL COMMUNITIES

Montana is a predominantly rural state. Montanans value our rural communities, lifestyle and the open landscapes. Rural communities are aging faster than the rest of the state. Rural communities have less political power due to smaller populations, and so we have fewer voices speaking for us. The needs of rural citizens and their communities include:

Infrastructure funding: Well-maintained infrastructure is vital for agriculture and local businesses to thrive. Water and sewer systems, volunteer fire departments, local law enforcement, public schools and well-maintained highways and roads keep our communities viable and livable. We struggle to fund these services. Infrastructure investments help maintain and improve businesses and communities and create good paying jobs.

Utilities: Rural communities need broadband internet access as well as improved telephone services including cell and landlines. Electric co-ops need to be open, democratic and responsive to the communities they serve.

Rural health care: Rural hospitals, telemedicine, veterans' health care, and mental health care are key to viable rural communities. Seniors need a range of care options from home health care to rehab centers and nursing homes.

Support for family farmers and sustainable agriculture: Farmers markets, farm to school, farm to table restaurants, small manufacturing of food products, niche markets--these provide jobs and access to locally sourced, sustainable foods. Rural voices must be heard on fair

trade, concentration in the meatpacking industry, country of origin labeling and the Farm Bill.

Farm transition to next generation: We support ways to help grow the next generation of those who will grow our food, including access to capital, mentorship for beginning farmers and ranchers, and improved extension services.

Education: Public schools are vital to rural communities and are our community and social hubs. Once a small town loses its public school, it loses its identity and its ability to attract young families to farm and ranch.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support state and federal policies that positively affect rural communities and oppose harmful policies.
- Support for policies in a Farm Bill that strengthen rural communities and family farms.
- Support Supplemental Food and Nutrition Program which provides necessary assistance for rural communities and citizens as well as farmers and ranchers.

FAIR TAXATION

We support a state system of taxation that provides adequate funding for public services. Tax revenue should fully fund our schools, universities, police and fire protection, the essential infrastructure of roads, bridges and internet networks throughout the state and the human services upon which so many of us depend. To reach these revenue goals, we support a tax system that is "progressive." By this we mean that we expect higher income residents, who have a greater ability to contribute to the general welfare of the state, to pay a larger percent of their income in taxes than those with lower incomes. Montana currently has a moderately progressive tax system, due in large part to the absence of a general sales tax.

Property taxes--The current property tax system results in substantial inequality in funding our schools because it relies on local mill levies. Property values vary widely among districts, so funding local levies also varies widely. The Montana Budget & Policy Center's recent report on property taxes provides evidence that substantiates the claim that property taxes are regressive.

Big Sky 55+ will:

- Support equalizing K-12 funding by levying a greater percentage of statewide mills to fund schools
- Support programs to protect low income property owners from rising property valuations.

- Support making the appraisal system which forms the basis of property tax valuation, a timely and accurate reflection of the market value of the property being assessed.
- Support passage of the 6 mil levy to support higher education in Montana

Natural resource taxes--Montana's economy has always been dependent on natural resource development. We recognize that resources such as minerals, coal, oil and gas are finite resources and their development degrades the environment to some extent.

Big Sky 55+ will:

- Support severance tax rates which recognize that resource development is generally not a sustainable source of revenue.
- Support the concept of banking tax revenue that comes from resource extraction and placing that revenue into trusts for the long term benefit of the state.
- Support the Coal Tax Trust and oppose efforts to "Bust the Trust".

Income taxes--We support a progressive income tax system. We believe that income derived from passive, investment activity should be taxed at a rate higher than the rate applied to employment income.

Big Sky 55+ will:

- Support a system of graduated income tax rates which increases the rate as income levels rise.
- Support efforts to increase tax rates on "passive income" derived from investment activity.
- Support efforts to capture income derived in Montana and oppose efforts to shelter income or transfer it out of state without paying Montana taxes.

- Support adequate funding for a tax collection system which is both fair and efficient.

Sales taxes--Targeted sales taxes are levied on a variety of products ranging from gasoline to tobacco. These taxes are often “regressive” (low income people pay a higher percentage of income). Still, these taxes are an important source of revenue and can achieve other public policy goals.

Big Sky 55 + will:

- Support increasing the tobacco tax and using the income for cessation and treatment programs.
- Oppose any effort to adopt a general sales tax in Montana.

MONTANA VETERANS

Montana's veterans have sacrificed for our great country. We must honor that sacrifice by taking care of them and their families. We can do better at taking care of veterans. Montana has one of the nation's highest rates of per-capita active duty soldiers and veterans. Stronger support is needed to provide veteran health services and to help military men and women transition back to civilian life.

Health Care Choice and Affordability:

Strengthen the Veterans Choice Act to better serve rural veterans

- Increase accountability at the Veterans Administration.
- Keep rural hospitals open.
- Expand access to health care and enhance mental health services for veterans.
- Make it easier for veterans to access the benefits they earned.
- Oppose The American Health Care Act because it is Un-American and will leave Montana Veterans without much-needed care.

Economic Development and Transitioning to the Workforce:

- Support the Veterans Entrepreneurial Transition Act that will enable veterans to receive entrepreneurial training programs and assistance on developing business plans to start their own business.
- Incentivize businesses to train and hire veterans.

BIG SKY 55+ WILL:

- Support and promote full and adequate funding for the Veterans Health Care Administration.
- Oppose any and all efforts to privatize veteran's services.
- Support federal and state legislation that protects and enhances Veterans health care throughout a veteran's lifetime.

NOTES:



FOUNDING BOARD

1. Paul Haber, Professor at UM, President, University Faculty Association (Missoula, MT)
2. Carol Juneau, Board Chair of Big Sky 55+, retired educator, former Montana State Senator, Mandan/Hidatsa (Great Falls, MT)
3. Stan Juneau, retired educator, Blackfeet (Great Falls, MT)
4. Terry Kendrick, Board Secretary of Big Sky 55+ and advocate (Missoula, MT)
5. Terry Lynn Minow, Rancher, retired educator, and former Political Director, MEA-MFT (Boulder, MT)
6. James Murry, former labor leader of the Montana AFL-CIO (Clancy, MT)
7. Nathaniel Powell-Palm, Farmer and Rancher, Cold Springs Ranch (Belgrade, MT)
8. Angela Russell, Attorney, former Montana State Representative (Lodge Grass, MT)
9. Pat Sweeney, Board Treasurer for Big Sky 55+, and Senior Advisor to Western Organization of Resource Councils, (WORC) (Billings, MT)
10. Ken Toole, Board Vice-Chair for Big Sky 55+, and former Montana State Senator, Public Service Commissioner and Director of Montana Human Rights Network (Cascade, MT)



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