

2022 Billings Legislature Voters Guide

Candidates in their own words

All candidates were reached out to via email to participate in this voters guide. The responses included are the words of candidates who responded.

MELISSA SMITH

District 44

How will you give back to Montana as an elected official?

I want to protect our great state constitution and make sure that our state budget and surplus is invested in Montana communities- particularly affordable housing, public land conservation and public safety. The Republican party is currently two seats away from a super-majority, which would enable them to call for a constitutional convention. I believe in the rights of all Montanans, regardless of party, and intend to engage with each of my constituents according to their individual needs and ideas for building a better, stronger community.

How will you make sure young adults have access to voting?

Before last year, Montana already had some of the most secure, most accessible elections in the US. The voter restrictions passed in last year's legislative session did nothing to improve our established security and must be revoked to ensure students and rural voters do not become disenfranchised.

What actions will you take to protect MT's environment for generations to come?

One of my favorite directive from our state constitution is the responsibility to maintain a clean and healthful environment. Access to our great, wild outdoors is a birthright of all Montanans that I mean to protect by advocating for legislation that requires responsible management by businesses and protects public access to public lands.

DENISE BAUM

District 47

How will you give back to Montana as an elected official?

I will continue to give back to Montana through my commitment to public service. As a detective with the Billings Police Department, I have proudly served the Billings community for 19 years. I'm actively involved in the community as an adult leader in my son's Boy Scout Troop which participates in numerous community service projects. A legislator should be faithful to the guiding principles and values contained in the Montana State Constitution and be committed to defending those rights and protections for ALL Montanans. Additionally, a legislator must be accountable, accessible, and responsive to those they serve.

What actions will you take to protect MT's environment for generations to come?

My family's activities revolve around outdoor recreation and our love of the outdoors. We hunt, fish and are avid hikers. In order to preserve and protect our public lands we must remove the influence of special interests from our wildlife management decisions and return to science based management, not decisions based on profit. Let's fully embrace the protections afforded to Montanans by our State Constitution by enforcing the fundamental right to a clean and healthful environment. Aggressively addressing climate change and imposing legislation with long-standing protections are needed to ensure clean water, air and a healthful environment for future generations.

How will you make sure young adults have access to voting?

N/R

JENNIFER MERECKI

District 48

How will you give back to Montana as an elected official?

My main goal is to be a voice for Montanans in the legislature. I am running for public service not position. We need someone to advocate for affordable housing, worker protections, access to healthcare, and protect our public lands and Constitution. It will take all of us to make that happen and I am willing to be the person who does the dirty work on the citizens behalf.

What actions will you take to protect MT's environment for generations to come?

Institute a carbon tax for the government to use the revenue for grant programs for clean energy company creation and product cost reductions. Also create a cap and trade system so as only a certain number of permits for greenhouse gas emissions, if a company needs more they have to trade with another company to buy them and make that price much larger than the initial permit. Uphold and increase clean energy standards. And keep public lands in public hands to ensure regulations.

How will you make sure young adults have access to voting?

I will defend the courts recent decision to reinstall College issued I.D.s as valid forms of identification for voting. Also be able to have ballot collection on campus and/or like to make it possible for polling stations within the school.

JAMES REAVIS

District 50

How will you give back to Montana as an elected official?

I am a public defender, a small business owner, and a lifelong Montanan. I will use my decade of legal experience to help draft better laws. I can read and understand bills that lobbyists will write. I'll help steer the Legislature towards laws that benefit everyone, not just special interests. I have represented dozens of patients who have been committed to Montana State Hospital (Warm Springs). I want to use my expertise in that field to rewrite our mental health commitment code so we can tackle Montana's mental health problems in a smarter and more proactive way.

How will you make sure young adults have access to voting?

I strongly support same-day voter registration and permitting various forms of ID, including a student ID. Our state must make voting as easy as possible, not more difficult. The previous Legislature passed many measures that curtailed voting protections for young people and college students. They have fortunately been overturned by the courts, but threats to our right to vote remain. My opponent, unfortunately, voted to restrict your right to vote. I urge you to cast your vote for a candidate who will protect your rights.

What actions will you take to protect MT's environment for generations to come?

I support Montana's ongoing transition to clean, renewable energy using a wide variety of resources such as solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and safe nuclear energy. I support "net metering," which means that when you connect a solar panel and send power back into the grid, you should receive a credit on your electric bill. I will oppose any measure that weakens Montana's clean air and water quality standards. As a Butte native, I have witnessed the long-term effects of environmental damage firsthand; we cannot let that happen again.

SHERRY ESSMANN

District 52

How will you give back to Montana as an elected official?

I hope to help maintain a common sense balanced state budget, to find ways to enhance public safety, to support strong family values and parental choice, to assure educational freedom, and to support affordable and reliable energy for all Montanans.

How will you make sure young adults have access to voting?

Young adults already have access to voting. Any 18 year old just needs a valid driver's license, a state issued ID card, a tribal ID card, a passport, or a military ID to vote, all of which can be obtained any time, not just during election years. Voter registration is easily accomplished in our state at any time, not just during election years. Forms are available from most counties online and in person at the County Election Office.

What actions will you take to protect MT's environment for generations to come?

Montana's environment is in good shape, as long as we keep doing the things we are doing. I would encourage responsible harvesting of our forests to help prevent wasteful forest fires, I would encourage responsible drilling and fracking of our oil and natural gas treasures, and I would encourage your generation to honor our wild lands and our cities as your parents and grandparents have done.