

WHO'S WHO? in Montana politics



Voting is a public way of saying, "Our families count, and all of our lives matter!"

Civic participation means getting everyday folks involved in the decisions that affect our families and communities. Election season is

an especially important time for us to speak up, and there are many ways we can all get involved in the process, regardless of our citizenship status or whether we can vote. Elections matter because elected leaders can make decisions that can either help or hurt our families. Politicians pay more attention to communities who participate in elections. Voting is a public way of saying, "Our families count, and all of our lives matter!"

NATIONAL ELECTED POSITIONS

US CONGRESS • Congress is made up of two separate bodies: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Together they form the legislative (law-making) branch of the Federal Government. There are no limits on the number of terms that a member of Congress can serve.


US REPRESENTATIVE


There are 435 members of the House of Representatives. All seats in the House are up for re-election every two years. The number of representatives from each state is based on population. Currently Montana has 1 representative.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Makes and passes federal laws.
- Allocates money to federal programs in yearly budget.
- Determines federal tax guidelines.
- Can propose changes to the Constitution.
- Has the power to declare war.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

 Chooses how programs such as Head Start, Medicaid, Cash Assistance, Social Security, relief for victims of natural disasters, military spending, child care, healthcare, and domestic violence services are funded or cut.

 Creates federal laws, including laws on immigration, healthcare, education, criminal justice, student loan interest rates, labor, and environmental protections.

US SENATOR

There are 100 US Senators, each serving a 6-year term. Each state elects two senators in a statewide election. Senate races are staggered so that only one senator in a state is up for election at a time.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Same as House of Representatives (above).
- In addition, the Senate approves the President's appointments to important positions, including the US Supreme Court and the Cabinet (the board that advises the President and holds offices in key departments).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Same as House of Representatives (above).

MONTANA STATEWIDE ELECTED POSITIONS



GOVERNOR

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Heads the state executive branch. Elected every four years in presidential election years. In Montana, a governor can serve a maximum of eight years in a 16-year period.

- Sends proposed budget to the Montana Legislature for approval.
- Has the power to veto bills passed by the legislature. Vetoes can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote in the Legislature.

-  Governor's budget, proposes funding levels for programs such as child care, healthcare, and domestic violence services.
-  Can call special Legislature sessions on urgent issues like MT school funding.

MONTANA STATE LEGISLATURE • The Montana Legislature is divided into two houses: the Montana State Senate and the Montana State House of Representatives. They meet every other year for 90 days.



MT STATE SENATORS

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The state is divided up into 50 State Senate Districts and each district can elect one senator. Senate seats are up for election every four years with a two-term limit (eight years).

- Enacts state laws in areas such as state taxes, education, child care, and conservation of natural resources.
- Shares budget-making responsibilities with the governor.

-  Decides how the state budget should be allocated. E.g., how much should go to Montana's public schools or how much should fund state healthcare programs like the CHIP program for low-income children.
-  Can pass state exemptions to the cash assistance program (TANF), determining whether program participants may count going to school as welfare-to-work hours.

MT STATE REPRESENTATIVES

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Montana has 100 State House Districts. Each district elects one representative. State House seats are up for election every two years, with a four-term maximum (eight years).

Same as State Senators (above).

Same as State Senators (above).


MT SECRETARY OF STATE

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Montana's chief elections officer. Elected every four years.

- Helps ensure the right to participate in federal, state, and local elections.
- Tracks legislation, bonds, mortgages, and corporate and state department records.

-  Helps ensure that no Montanan is unfairly denied the right to vote.


SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Head of the state Department of Education. Elected every four years.

- Supervises all public schools in the state and distributes state education money.
- Defines teacher certification and can mandate curricula for schools.

-  Helps ensure that all schools in Montana provide a quality education.

MT ATTORNEY GENERAL

The state's chief legal and law enforcement officer, heads the state Department of Justice. Elected every four years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Represents the state and state's position in all legal matters in court.
- Supervises the state's 56 county attorneys.
- Helps provide public safety services.
- Enforces health, safety, and consumer regulations
- Enforces civil rights laws including disability rights, economic discrimination in mortgage lending, racial profiling, and discrimination in public accommodations.
- Serves as one of four members of the cabinet, overseeing all major executive decisions.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Helps ensure that orders of protection in domestic violence cases are correctly enforced around the state.

MT STATE SUPREME COURT

The Montana Supreme Court is the highest court in the state, with one Chief Justice and six Justices. All are elected by the voters in statewide, nonpartisan elections (candidates do not run as part of a political party), and Justices serve eight-year terms. No more than two positions are up for election at once.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Review cases from lower Montana courts and can reverse or uphold (agree with) previous decisions.
- Decide cases that are filed directly with the MT Supreme Court.
- Supervise all state courts to make sure they are functioning effectively and efficiently.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Make decisions about our fundamental rights protected by the MT Constitution, including our right to privacy and a clean and healthy environment.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONERS

Public Service Commissioners (or PSCs) regulate utilities in Montana. The state is divided into five PSC districts. Each district elects one commissioner every four years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Regulate private and investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies in Montana.
- Work to balance the need for consumers to have quality, affordable service with utility company's need to earn a fair profit.
- Regulate and ensure safety of transportation of commodities such as oil and gas.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



Determine how much your utility company can raise their rates.



Determine what kind of assistance utility companies need to provide to help low-income families with rate increases.

MT COMMISSIONER OF SECURITIES & INSURANCE

Serves as the state's commissioner of insurance, securities and the state land board. Elected every four years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- In charge of regulating insurance companies, including health insurance providers, to protect Montana consumers.
- Oversees regulation of securities (stocks and bonds) for the state.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU



The Auditor advocates for citizens who have been victims of insurance or investment fraud.

LOCAL ELECTED POSITIONS



COUNTY COMMISSION

The county commission is made of three elected officials who together head county government. All county voters participate in electing every commissioner. Terms are six years; one seat is up for election every two years.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Forms county policies in areas such as subdivisions, transportation, emergency services, etc.
- Provides metropolitan services like garbage and recycling, public transportation like buses and rail, public housing, and libraries.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

-  Can provide financial support to community services, which support low-income women and families.
-  Makes zoning decisions that can either promote or prevent the development of low-income housing.


CITY MAYOR

Oversees all city departments and making sure all policies are being applied efficiently and fairly, city mayors are elected every four years by city voters.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Secures resources to meet city's goals.
- Serves as the city's primary representative with other cities and government agencies.
- Breaks tie votes in the city council; can veto measures passed by the council (council can override with a 2/3 majority vote).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

-  Can provide leadership to promote diversity and inclusion of all citizens in our community.



CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

City council members create city policies and ordinances. The city is divided into ward; each ward is represented by two council members.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Set city taxes and manage the city budget.
- Oversee all construction and improvement projects in the city.
- Work with the mayor and city staff to develop city's strategic plan.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

-  Can provide financial support to community services, which support low-income women and families.
-  Make zoning decisions that can either promote or prevent the development of low-income housing.

WHAT IF I CAN'T VOTE?

You must be at least 18 and a US citizen to vote. [But you can still make a difference!](#)

- Encourage and educate people who can vote.
- Share this guide at your church or with your neighbors, friends, and/or family.
- Write letters to your local paper about the issues you care about.

If you are currently incarcerated, you cannot vote. If you are serving parole or probation, you can vote, but will need to re-register on your release.

MONTANA WOMEN VOTE is a statewide coalition that organizes low-income women as informed voters, policy advocates, and community leaders.

STRONG FAMILIES is a program of Forward Together. Montana Women Vote is a member of Strong Families, joining more than 125 groups working to change how we think, feel, act, and make policy about families.

For more information, contact: Montana Women Vote at 725 W. Alder St., Suite #21, Missoula, MT 59802. Call us at (406) 317-1505



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