



Big Sky 55+
P.O. 1462
Helena, MT 59624

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Gathering Wisdom - Building Power!

BS55+ STATEWIDE CONFERENCE MARCH 21-22 / BILLINGS

Mark your calendars and gather with Big Sky 55+ members, leaders, allies and friends for two days of engaging ideas and conversations to help us build a better Montana for all. Watch for more information and registration after January 1.



Featured speakers include Bozeman based writer Betsy Gaines Quammen who's touring with her newly released book, "True West: Myth & Mending on the Far Side of America". Montana Federation of Public Employees President Amanda Curtis and Rep. Jonathan Karlen will join a distinguished panel to address the

question, **How can we make our Montana tax system more fair and just, and why is that so important?**

Additional speakers and panels TBA. Topics to include:

- Navigating Montana's News Landscape in the Age of Misinformation
- Aging in Montana with Dignity and Grace
- Standing Up for Health Care in Montana
- Future of Medicare
- Tax Fairness
- Mobilizing Our 55+ Superpowers
- Inspiration, Conversation, Mobilizing for Action

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Thank you, Tully

FOR A JOB WELL DONE

by Terry Minow, Big Sky 55+ Board Chair

Earlier this Fall, Big Sky 55+ Executive Director, Tully Olson, moved on to another important position in Montana. We are sorry to see him go, but are so thankful for all he achieved in his five years with us.

With the help of our fantastic members, great staff, and dedicated board of directors, **Tully accomplished the following, and more:**

- Grew Big Sky 55+ membership by tenfold!
- Sponsored our first statewide rally (*see back page*).
- Increased Medicaid reimbursements for long term care facilities in the 2023 Legislature.
- Trained 30 Great Falls community activists through the Great Falls Leadership Program.
- Held 5 statewide Town Hall meetings to educate Montanans on affordable housing, fair taxation, long term care and threats to Montana's constitution.

Although we are a new organization, founded in 2018, Big Sky 55+ has established a reputation for providing effective leadership to help create a better Montana for people of all ages. In the 2023 legislative session, our legislative alerts resulted in more than 15,000 emails and countless calls to legislators, amplifying the voices of older Montanans and increasing our influence on critical issues that affect the people of our state.

We aren't missing a beat as we continue to push for policies that make Montana a better place to live and thrive. Big Sky 55+ board member and lobbyist Margie MacDonald has stepped forward to serve as Executive Director until the end of 2024. It's a big job but Margie has the energy, enthusiasm, and expertise to continue our mission of being a strong and articulate voice for older Montanans.

Mark your calendar for our first statewide conference, **Gaining Wisdom - Building Power, March 21-22 in Billings**. We will be diving into long term solutions to make Montana's tax system more fair, aging with dignity and grace, exploring and engaging our 55+ superpowers, figuring out how to spot misinformation and find good information in the changing media climate, and keeping health care accessible in Montana!

The future looks bright for Big Sky 55+. We are so thankful to Tully, Margie, and all of you for your good work!



On October 2, Big Sky 55+ hosted a Rally for Fair Taxes in the Montana Capitol Rotunda to raise awareness of the property tax shift caused by the 2023 Montana Legislature and Governor. Nearly 200 Montanans attended.

Speaking at the rally were Big Sky 55+ board chair Terry Minow, former Cascade County Commissioner Jane Weber, and former Governor Brian Schweitzer.



Terry Minow kicked off the rally, explaining that in November of 2022, the Montana Department of Revenue alerted the Governor and the Legislature about the impending rise in property values. The 2023 Legislature had the power to protect Montana homeowners from large property tax increases, as previous legislatures had done, by changing one formula in one law. The Governor and the Republican Supermajority in the Legislature chose not to adopt this

simple fix. As a result, they **shifted taxes from large corporations and businesses onto the backs of residential property owners, raising homeowner property taxes 43% on average.**

Jane Weber explained that contrary to what the Governor and Supermajority legislators claimed, local government was not at fault here. Local government is the most restricted in how much they can increase property taxes -- the amount doesn't even keep up with inflation. Local governments provide the services that Montana communities rely on – public schools, roads, and safety services like police and fire.

And finally, Brian Schweitzer asked why the Supermajority in the legislature raised our taxes when they were working with the largest budget surplus in history? He brought out bags of "money" to show where the property tax increase for homeowners would actually go: a very large bag representing tax cuts for corporations, and a very small bag that would go to local government.

The rally was informative and uplifting and we thank all who were able to attend, those who helped spread the word, and especially our speakers.

Do you have your own story about how the property tax increase is affecting you and your family? Join your fellow Montanans in sharing your experience on the Montana Tax Shift Stories website: www.tribute.co/mttaxshift. Need help adding your story? Email info@bigsky55.org.



PRESCRIPTION DRUG SAVINGS *by Sen. Jon Tester*

Last year, with the support of Montana’s seniors and Big Sky 55+, we made history by fighting back against Big Pharma and passing the Inflation Reduction Act. This historic law cuts costs for all Montanans, stands up to corporate special interests, and as of last month is going to bring cheaper prescription drugs to seniors in Montana.

Thanks to my Inflation Reduction Act, **Medicare will now negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to secure fairer prescription drug prices** for patients. That means keeping more money in your pockets as we hold Big Pharma accountable for jacking up prices.

This week, Medicare announced the first **10 common medications that will be negotiated down:**

Eliquis Anticoagulant medication used to treat and prevent blood clots and to prevent stroke.

Jardiance Antidiabetic medication used to improve glucose control in people with type 2 diabetes.

Xarelto Used to treat and prevent blood clots. May lower risk of stroke, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), pulmonary embolism (PE), and similar conditions.

Januvia Used as a once-daily prescription pill to help lower blood sugar levels in adults with type 2 diabetes.

Farxiga Used to treat type 2 diabetes and adults with heart failure and chronic kidney disease.

Entresto Fixed-dose combination medication for use in heart failure.

Enbrel Biologic medical product used to treat autoimmune diseases.

Imbruvica Used to treat certain cancers such as chronic lymphocytic leukemia/small lymphocytic lymphoma, Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia.

Stelara Used to treat adults with moderately to severe Crohn's disease.

Fiasp; Fiasp FlexTouch; Fiasp PenFill; NovoLog; NovoLog FlexPen; NovoLog PenFill Insulin.

Price cuts go into effect in 2026, but that's just the start. My Inflation Reduction Act will continue to target additional common prescription drugs for price cuts, and I'll continue to take on anyone to cut costs for working families and seniors. The bottom line is this: Montanans should never have to choose between putting food on the table and securing life-saving medication.

Together, we stood tough against the massive pharmaceutical corporations to make health care more affordable and accessible for Montanans, and I'm proud we’ve won the first stage of that fight this week. You sent me to Washington to deliver results, and I will continue to take on anyone, including Big Pharma, to lower costs for Montana’s seniors.



TAX COMMITMENT

by Amanda Curtis

For generations, Republican and Democrat administrations alike have managed the adjust the Montana tax formula to ensure a fair distribution of taxes among homeowners, farmers, ranchers, and Montana’s largest corporations. Not the Gianforte administration. They managed to let the legislature leave town last May without protecting homeowners, renters, or Main Street business owners from the massive tax landslide we’re experiencing today.

You may have heard folks talking recently about the great “tax shift” that’s happening in Montana under the Gianforte administration. You may have heard it described as a shift in the “tax burden” each citizen carries. While it’s completely true that homeowners and renters are now paying for a larger slice of the tax pie than ever before, I refuse to talk about the situation using the term “burden.”

Taxes are like union dues. In our union, we all agree to pool our money together in the form of dues so that we can have voice and power in our workplaces. By paying dues, we each affirm our shared commitment to work together toward the protection of our professions, pensions, and paychecks.

Our taxes are your and my commitment to living together in society with other humans. We pool our money in the form of taxes so we can have nice things like clean water, safe roads and bridges, public education, and fire departments, just to name a few of the public services funded by our collective tax commitment.

Every entity that enjoys the benefits of public water systems, roads, and fire departments has a shared responsibility to fund these public services. That includes hard rock mines, pipelines, telecoms, and utilities. Some might argue that the largest landowners reaping the largest profits from our beautiful state should fund the largest slice of the tax commitment pie. Not Gianforte, though.

According to the legislative fiscal division, hard rock mines, pipelines, telecoms, and utilities have seen their tax commitment decreased by the same 9% that homeowners, renters, and small business owners have seen ours increase. While I’m committed to paying for the infrastructure on which we all depend, I can’t help but wish this administration had done like every administration before and adjusted the formula to strike a tax balance that will allow Montanans to stay in our family homes. That doesn’t seem like too much to ask.