

OPINION

The **MONTANA STANDARD**

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Zinke threat to lands

When someone who rigs his fly rod backwards promises you that he supports our public lands, think twice. I choked on my coffee when I saw Ryan Zinke's campaign piece lying about his record on public lands in saying he "led the charge against the sale or transfer of public lands."



JOCK CONYNGHAM

The truth is that Zinke has — through his statements, actions, votes and policies — joined the assault on America's public lands and the strong drive to transfer or sell the lands that support out hunting, fishing, and outdoor culture.

Zinke seems to think that Montanans will forget his support for multiple public land giveaways in his checkered political past. Well, we haven't.

Here are a few highlights from Zinke's real record on public lands:

— As a Montana state senator, Zinke signed a pledge showing his support for transferring public lands to the states, leading inevitably to the sale of Montana's public lands to private interests.

— On Zinke's first day in Congress, he voted to change House rules to make it easier to transfer federal public lands to the highest bidder.

— At the Interior Department, Zinke oversaw the administration's largest reduction of public lands ever by shrinking the Bears Ears National Monument & Grand Staircase Escalante by nearly 2 million acres. The management plans also included selling off hundreds of acres while prioritizing oil and gas development.

Time and time again, his cozy relationship with oil and gas has come at the expense of our public lands. When given the choice, he always throws our public lands under the bus. He is currently under investigation for a sweetheart real estate deal backed by the chairman of Halliburton, America's largest oil-services company — all ironed out while he was at the helm of the Interior Department. Ethics experts call this a classic conflict of interest: the one benefiting financially from an energy company also regulates that industry on behalf of the American people.

And let's not even get into how he proposed doubling National Park entrance fees (while he faced ethics investigations for spending more than \$12,000 on a private jet flight from Las Vegas to Whitefish).

Zinke has long branded himself as a "Teddy Roosevelt" Republican — false advertising. Teddy Roosevelt's great-grandson publicly rebuked this claim.

Whether it's the altitude of flying high on taxpayer dollars or the odor of the swamp, Zinke seems to be in a fog that makes him forget that Montanans have a long memory when it comes to our public lands. Make no mistake: Zinke has a consistent record of supporting federal transfer of public lands and supporting their sale to private interests. His fly rod is rigged wrong once again.

Jock Conyngham of Evaro is board chair of Montana Conservation Voters.

READERS SPEAK

Undermining democracy

The cynical move by Republican legislators to call for an investigation of electoral integrity in Montana — a state their party swept in 2020, and one that Trump carried by ridiculous margins in both 2016 and 2020 — rings hollow with anyone who has been paying attention. It also received far too prominent billing in the state's news media.

The real purpose of this national Republican strategy is to undermine people's confidence in elections, and in democracy itself. It is an extension of Trump's "Big Lie," that the election was stolen from him through chicanery — even though other Republicans on the same ballots won handily in many jurisdictions. If Republicans can cast doubt on the validity of elections, they can refuse to accept the verdict whenever they lose, and they can destroy the core principle of democracy: free and fair elections and the peaceful transfer of power. Thus the repetition of the Arizona circus in other states controlled by Republicans.

Why do these people who are too quick to admire Putin in Russia and Orban in Hungary, wish to push aside

real democracy for a hybrid authoritarian/theocratic government dressed in democratic language? Because they are scared spineless by the demography of the future which, if unchecked, would make a continuing minority of a party that insists on being essentially white and Christian (evangelical brand), and is hostile to the tools of progress, enlightenment and civilization: science, higher education, reason, equal opportunity and a Jesuit appreciation for the dignity of all human beings.

Thus, rather than pursuing electoral integrity, they work to rig the system themselves through voter suppression and partisan veto of election results. And they are running out of time. Thus the panic to enact an anti-democracy agenda. Pretending to work for election integrity is the perfect camouflage for those working to rig the system on behalf of perpetual control by a white minority in thrall to wealthy donors and a religious arm of Christian nationalists set on controlling education and establishing the rules for personal and social life.

Will enough people catch on to this? Not unless the news media catch on first.

Lawrence K. Pettit, Helena

Submit a letter to the editor

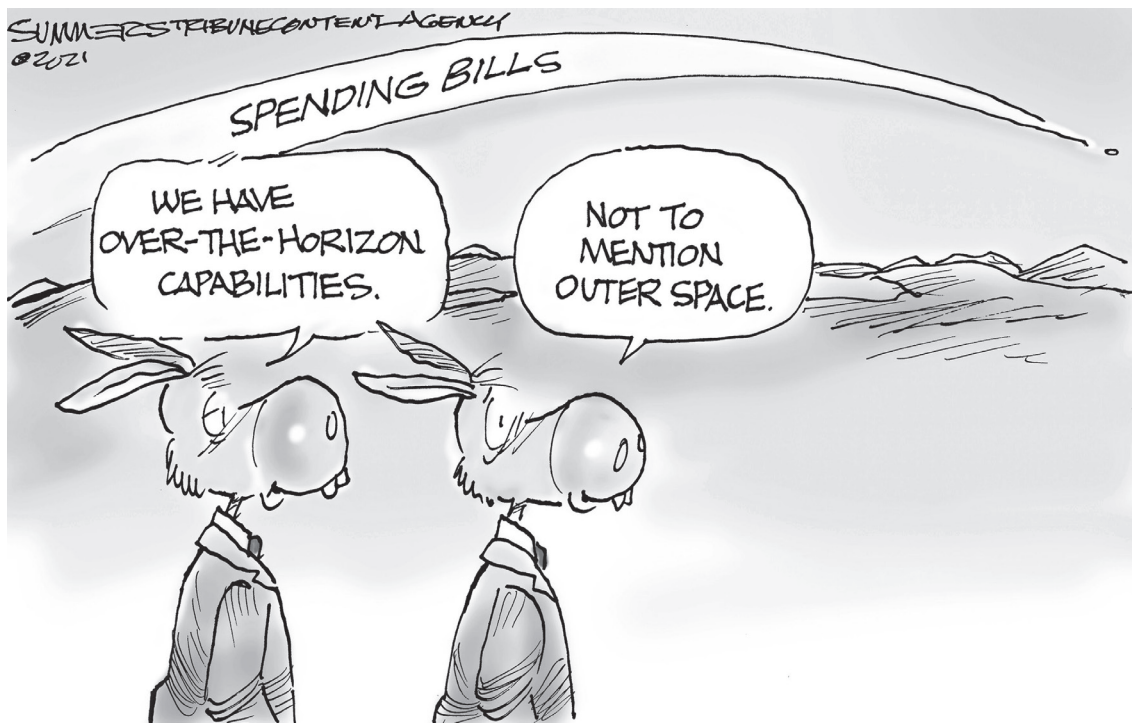
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To encourage a wide variety of authors, we ask that you limit submissions to one every 30 days. Exceptions are sometimes made to accommodate healthy dialogue, but for the most part we adhere to that policy.

Thanks in advance for your contributions. Letters live up an editorial page like nothing else can. Questions? Call or e-mail Editor David McCumber at editor@mtstandard.com.

EMAIL SUBMISSION

Email your letter to the editor to editor@mtstandard.com.



Just no time to waste

Carbon pricing can ease transition to clean energy future

Clean energy is popular, but sometimes it's hard to see how we're going to get there from here.



KRISTEN WALSER

In a poll taken this spring, two-thirds of registered voters in the US supported transitioning the U.S. economy from fossil fuels to 100% clean energy by 2050.

In a recent guest opinion, State Sen. Ankney, a tireless advocate for the people of Colstrip, said "no one wants to cheer up [climate champion] Greta Thunberg more than I do," but he seems wary of the Clean Energy Payment Program (CEPP), and worried about losing affordable, reliable fossil fuel energy and jobs, saying "No one knows how all of that energy would be replaced."

While there is always uncertainty, experts have been planning for this transformation to clean energy for decades. So have entrepreneurs, who are daily announcing 21st Century innovations, like hydrogen gas storage in the salt domes of Utah, or the molten salt energy storage facility being considered for the decommissioned coal plant in Hayden, CO.

Closer to home, the Northwest Power and Conservation

Council's latest 5-year Plan (draft, comment at nwcouncil.org) shows how market forces are already and will continue to be a large driver of this switch from coal, since wind and solar PV are the least expensive options for utilities and their customers.

The Council is "confident" that concerns about the daily fluctuation in renewable energy can be managed reliably by coordinating with other sources, like hydropower, energy efficiency, demand response (voluntary reduction of demand at certain hours of the day), existing resources (gas, nuclear, and remaining coal), and regional collaboration in the Western electric grid, which will "produce significant cost savings and introduce more efficiency into system operations."

With some of the best wind energy potential in the country, Montana could even maintain our regional net exporter status and lower electricity rates by about 40% by 2050.

State regulators and legislators in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have also asked for coal retirements, as they face calls to lower carbon pollution and warming from agricultural producers and other outdoor industries who are being directly affected by drought, wildfire, and heat; insurance companies and CEO's facing unmanageable risk; and young people afraid for our future.

The irony is that utilities are the industry most vulnerable to climate disruptions. (S&P Global) Coal plants have already had to shut down when water supplies

are too hot to cool their systems.

There's really no time to waste to start implementing an orderly transition to alternatives.

Senators Tester and Daines should support cost-effective policies like carbon pricing, that place a fee on carbon pollution and let the businesses, industries, utilities, and families decide the least cost and most efficient way to reduce their emissions, without additional government mandates.

Economists affirm carbon prices act quickly and effectively. They also speed the development of innovative technologies, by making them cost competitive, and can influence other countries to have their own carbon price.

Most importantly, we need to take care of American households during this shift. Money raised by the carbon fee can be given as a cash-back rebate to families to offset higher energy costs. Some of that substantial revenue should be used to help fossil fuel workers and other communities with transition and resiliency needs.

Right now Congress has a chance to plan ahead and shape our energy future. We know Senators Tester and Daines have Montana's best interests at heart. Ask them to smooth the clean energy transition for Americans with careful planning and well-designed carbon pricing. Let's cheer up Greta and Senator Ankney.

Kristen Walser is co-coordinator for Citizens' Climate Lobby Montana.

GUEST VIEW

Collaborate for change

The Montana skies have been a muted hazy grey for much of the summer and early fall. The rivers were too low and hot in June, before the real summer even hit. Wildfire has been raging across Montana and many other places in the West, and family members and friends are out fighting those fires.



BECKY EDWARDS



WINONA BATEMAN



MICHELLE UBERUAGA

In our circles, it's the parents and caregivers that are not okay. Our families are living in a climate crisis — extreme heat, wildfire, flooding, and more — on top of a public health crisis overwhelmingly impacting caregivers. This is not a prediction of the future; we are living it. Climate change is no longer an esoteric theory, but rather our reality. It's happening. The

only question is, how bad will we allow it to get before we take bold action?

In Montana, our extreme summer heat waves, drought, and lengthy wildfire and smoke seasons are exacerbated by the planet's increasing temperature. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report tells us things will get

much hotter very quickly if we do not act. What does that future mean for our children? Will they be spending most of their summer days inside? Will they be able to fish, or will restrictions on rivers never end? Are our winters at risk? Our kids are watching and they are worried.

We need action at all levels of our society — business, government, citizens, local, state and federal. Some Montana leaders are stepping up to the plate. Please find the climate champions in your community and learn how to support them. Yet, many of our elected officials are voting time and time again against science, against bold action. Politicians putting their heads in the sand on climate action is no longer acceptable.

At the state level, we need to embrace Montana's potential for clean energy and let that market flourish, supporting our state's capable force of energy professionals and their communities to transition into the new economy in an equitable manner. We need to end projects that increase air pollution, for the climate and our communities. Montanans are ready for the jobs of the future, not the past. The recently released Vibrant Clean Energy study for Montana shows that pursuing deep decarbonization will create many more Montana jobs and reduce energy costs for Montanans than doubling down on fossil fuels.

Just last month, the Senate passed two bills that provide funding and incentives for clean energy jobs, electric school

buses and public transit systems, electric vehicle charging stations, clean water infrastructure, air quality monitors, and more. These bipartisan bills are a step in the right direction, and we commend Senator Tester for his work as one of the bipartisan architects of this landmark legislation.

We need leaders in politics, business, education, health care, and more to take a cue from this bipartisan group of Senators, roll up their sleeves, and work together to find solutions for our kids and theirs.

To that end, our leaders need to hear from us regularly about what they can do to take climate action. Calling or emailing Governor Gianforte and our federal delegation regularly is a great way to make your voice heard, especially with limited time and resources. Another way to take action is simply to talk about your concerns about our warming climate with friends and family. Talking about climate change is crucial to building support for action. Search out climate leaders and efforts in your community, or start one.

We have the solutions we need to address the climate emergency. We need to make change, despite our differences. Our shared future depends on it.

Winona Bateman with Families for a Livable Climate, Becky Edwards with Mountain Mamas, and Michelle Uberuaga with Moms Clean Air Force are all parents working together to find climate solutions in their communities, for their children and yours.