

## Where's the action in the 67th legislative session?

Every legislative session has its own distinct personality. Certain issues rise to the fore and others are left behind. Some of you may be waiting on Action Alerts or phone tree calls that haven't yet come.

You haven't gotten these alerts because, thus far, our core issues of conservation and family agriculture have not taken center stage this session. Instead, the dominant concerns have surrounded bills that would harm marginalized Montanans, make participating in our democracy harder, and continue to divide us -- rather than helping Montanans get back on their feet economically and otherwise after a challenging

year. We appreciate all of the support and solidarity that Northern Plains members are extending to allies targeted by some of this legislation. Meanwhile, we're keeping an eye on the big picture and watching for what might be just around the corner.

Things can change fast in Helena, and we're ready to shift gears at any moment. Some key bills we're excited to support were recently introduced or will be next week. We'll be reaching out soon with more ways to take action on those. Until then, you can read below to learn more about our strategy to get C-PACE passed this session!

## Getting on PACE for success in today's legislative climate

This week, we introduced our Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) bill (SB 147)! Many of you may know this is the third consecutive legislative session where we've tried to get C-PACE passed. We came so close in 2019, and we want to make sure we can get it over the finish line in 2021! This means we have to know our audience and speak their language.

C-PACE is a program that gives businesses and ag producers access to upfront financing from local banks to make

property upgrades that help them save on their utility bills. The program is voluntary and the financing is repaid as an assessment on the property's annual tax bill. These savings come from energy efficiency and water conservation upgrades.

As we all know, our politics have become increasingly polarized and divided. This is true even in Montana, a state with a strong tradition of independent thinking. As a result, we have to be extremely disciplined. We must focus on the aspects of our bills that appeal to all legislators if we hope to be successful.

For instance, we know that many legislators aren't concerned about "energy efficiency." All legislators, however, are concerned about helping businesses and ag producers save money (and so are we!) C-PACE will also create new construction jobs for folks who work on these upgrades. All legislators support creating new jobs, too (and so do we - especially when they result from work that advances our conservation values)!



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**With that in mind, we know the following C-PACE benefits have broad appeal to all legislators, and we're working hard to stay focused on repeating these key points when we talk to them:**

- C-PACE provides immediate cost savings for hardworking small business owners and ag producers.
- Montana businesses need every cost-saving measure they can get after COVID has hit their bottom lines

so hard. C-PACE provides that support.

- C-PACE will create new construction jobs in Montana for years to come.
- C-PACE is a win-win for both local banks and small businesses who utilize the program. Local banks get to expand their offerings and make a profit from the interest, and small businesses get to save on their utility bills and increase their property's value!

We are grateful to all of you for contacting legislators and working to strengthen Montana's communities. We hope the ideas above help as we negotiate a challenging legislative session in 2021!

## Testifying for the first time

Testifying at the legislature is a big deal, and we're always impressed when folks do it for the first time (warning - once you see how rewarding it is, you might just get addicted.) We want to give a shout out to members Millie Gunderson of Glendive and Simon Cecil of Billings for testifying this session for the first time.

Millie provided testimony in opposition to HB 176, a bill that would make it harder to register to vote on Election Day. She told a personal story as part of her testimony:

*"Election Day voter registration provides just one additional opportunity for working people to cast their vote where they might not otherwise be able to. Until retiring this year, I worked at a health clinic in Wibaux, 45 minutes from my home in Glendive. I would not have been able to run over to the Glendive courthouse to get late registered during a break from my work day. Many people who work far from home, work long hours, or live in a rural area face the same predicament. We need the ability to register on Election Day."*

Simon testified in support of HB 98, a bill that would extend the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task force. Here is part of what Simon had to say on behalf of Northern Plains:

*"Northern Plains is testifying to offer our support on behalf of the indigenous members of our organization, as well as in solidarity with our indigenous allies across Montana. We know that the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People is far from solved, and we know that while this Task Force has made exceptional headway over the last two years, their work is still deeply needed."*

*"I live in Billings, where just last month, the national non-profit Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA issued a community alert for Billings, after a string of trafficking instances. Montana still needs this Task Force."*

Thank you, Millie and Simon, for lending your voices to create a better Montana! And thank you to all of our members for the many ways you embody grassroots democracy.

### IMPORTANT TIPS TO HELP PREPARE FOR VIRTUAL TESTIMONY:

- **Register by noon the day before** the hearing you want to testify in, and you will be emailed a Zoom link (start here: [leg.mt.gov/session/have-your-say/](https://leg.mt.gov/session/have-your-say/))
- Simply click the Zoom link at the time of the scheduled hearing, and you will be placed in a queue
- Most of the time, video is NOT enabled for virtual hearings. As a result, we suggest you create a profile picture for your zoom account to help personalize your testimony.
- Every committee is different. While the legislature has crafted broad rules governing public participation, committee chairs have some discretion over the specifics of how they conduct their hearings. The result is that hearings have slight differences in their structure and execution.

PULL-OUT SECTION

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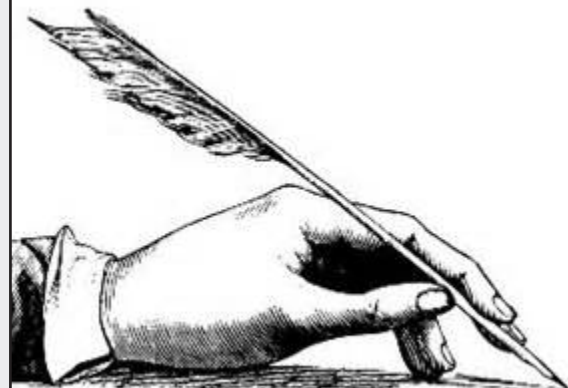
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**In this week's bulletin we have provided postcards for two bills that address our core issues: Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) and Mandatory Country-of-Origin-Labeling (COOL). Each bill has a separate postcard for your Senator and your Representative. Even if you're making calls or testifying, please consider mailing these, too! Every method we have to let our representatives know what issues we care about helps build momentum to get these bills passed!**

**If you need to find out who your Representative or Senator is, go here: [leg.mt.gov/map/](http://leg.mt.gov/map/)**



## BILL POSITIONS

### BILLS WE SUPPORT

#### **HB 35 - Protect indigenous communities by establishing a missing persons review commission**

Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy (D-Crow Agency)

HB 35 would establish a permanent review commission housed within the Montana Department of Justice to examine the trends and patterns of missing indigenous persons in Montana; educate the public, law enforcement, and policy makers about their findings; and recommend policies, practices, and strategies – including collaboration between jurisdictions – to deal with this preventable crisis. Ensuring the personal safety of all Montanans is essential work before we can meaningfully and fully address issues of conservation and environmental protection.

#### **HB 36 - Fund training for community-based missing persons response teams**

Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy (D-Crow Agency)

HB 36 would establish a fund and program in the Montana Department of Justice for the purpose of training community response teams to address the preventable crisis of missing indigenous peoples. Ensuring the personal safety of all Montanans is essential work before we can meaningfully and fully address issues of conservation and environmental protection.

#### **HB 98 - Keep Montana's Indigenous communities safe while extending LINC grant**

Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy (D-Crow Agency)

Similar to SB 4, HB 98 would extend the Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force until 2023 in order to improve cooperation and accountability between federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement while addressing jurisdictional barriers. This bill would also include a LINC (looping in native communities) grant, which would fund efforts and coordination by Montana tribes to identify, report, and find missing Native American persons. The disproportionate threat to indigenous peoples' health and safety must be addressed before we can meaningfully tackle conservation issues.

#### **HB 99 - Defend Montana energy customers from pre-approval**

Rep. Denise Hayman (D-Bozeman)

HB 99 would repeal the "pre-approval" process from state law. Pre-approval allows Montana's largest monopoly energy

utility, NorthWestern Energy, to get permission from the Public Service Commission to shift the costs of operating and maintaining power generation facilities to customers. This creates a dynamic where captive ratepayers assume the financial risks of these acquisitions while executives and shareholders enjoy the profits. NorthWestern tried to use this scheme in 2020 to buy a larger share of the aging Colstrip Power Plant. HB 99 would protect consumers by ensuring power companies can't shift all of their business risks and costs onto customers for generations to come.

#### **SB 107 - Expand democracy with extended voter registration**

Sen. Bryce Bennett (D-Helena)

SB 107 would make it easier for Montanans to exercise their democratic rights by extending the regular voter registration deadline by almost three weeks. Under current law, regular voter registration closes 30 days before election day. SB 107 would extend that deadline, so that regular voter registration remains open until 10 days before election day. This expanded registration period would provide single parents, students, and those with multiple jobs better access to the most fundamental democratic process, ensuring more Montanans have the opportunity to shape the public policies that affect our land, water, and lives.

#### **SB 147 - Help small businesses and ag producers save money on utility bills while creating jobs**

Sen. Mary McNally (D-Billings)

SB 147 would enable Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) programs in Montana. C-PACE is a financing tool that allows commercial property owners (including ag businesses) to secure 100% upfront financing from local banks to make property upgrades to help them save on their utility bills. The program is voluntary and the financing is repaid as an assessment on the property's annual tax bill. Only properties that would save more on their utility bills than they pay in assessments qualify. C-PACE helps small businesses and ag producers save money while creating construction jobs in Montana!

### STAY ENGAGED THIS SESSION

Visit the Legislature page of our website to find everything you need to stay informed and take action during the legislature:

[NorthernPlains.org/issues/legislature/](https://NorthernPlains.org/issues/legislature/)

## BILLS WE OPPOSE

### **HB 176 - Diminish Montanans' democratic right to vote**

Rep. Sharon Greef (R – HD88)

HB 176 would make it harder for Montanans to register to vote, diminishing our democratic right to have a say in who represents us and the decisions made that affect our lives. HB 176 would ban voter registration after 5 p.m. the Friday before an election and ban same day voter registration. Diminishing these voting rights could disproportionately affect working people, single parents, and other Montanans whose busy lives and work schedules bring challenges to accessing polling places during regular hours. Ensuring

### **TAKE ACTION!**

**Call (406) 444-4800 and ask to leave a message for the House State Administration Committee. Tell them to VOTE NO on HB 176!**

citizens have a say in the policies that affect our land, water, and lives is a fundamental value of Northern Plains. Any effort to curtail voting rights is a threat to our core values.

### **SB 84 - Risk the independence of the consumers' voice in Montana's energy decisions**

Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip)

SB 84 would restructure the Legislative Consumer Committee, which appoints and oversees the Montana Consumer Counsel. The Consumer Counsel acts on behalf of Montana's energy consumers in matters concerning utility law, policy, and practice. The Counsel works to ensure that monopoly utility companies like NorthWestern Energy do not raise prices unfairly, generate energy from expensive sources, or make other decisions that don't serve the public interest. SB 84 would replace the Legislative Consumer Committee with a Consumer Subcommittee housed under the Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee. This change would put the committee in a more overtly political space, risking the independence of an important oversight committee that gives the public a greater say in Montana's energy decisions.