SETH BODNAR
INDEPENDENT
U.S. SENATE

MAKING THE MONTANA WAY OF LIFE A REALITY AGAIN

Our way of life shouldn't be something we have to fight so hard to keep. Unfortunately, Washington politicians stopped showing up and have failed the hard-working families of this great state. Montanans who show up to work every day deserve to afford a roof over their heads, see a doctor when they're sick, provide for their families, and retire with dignity. We must renew that promise.

Affordability isn't an abstraction here in Montana. It's whether a young family in Kalispell can find a starter home. It's whether a rancher in Forsyth can see a doctor without driving three hours. It's whether a Montanan on a fixed income can heat a home through a hard winter. I'll fight to bring housing costs and healthcare costs back in line with what Montana families actually earn.

But our way of life isn't just about dollars and cents. It's about protecting the right of every Montanan – and every generation of Montanans still to come – to breathe clean air and drink clean water. It's about defending our public lands as common ground, where every Montanan, regardless of background or income, can hunt, fish, and recreate. It's about honoring Indigenous culture and heritage as a vital part of the fabric of this state, respecting Tribal sovereignty and fulfilling our treaty obligations. And it's about keeping the promises we made to the nearly 9 percent of Montanans who wore this country's uniform.

KEY PRIORITIES:

(1) Build Homes Montanans Can Actually Afford

The American Dream starts with a roof over your family member's heads, but that dream is slipping out of reach. The average cost of a home in Montana has nearly doubled since 2018, while incomes have increased by only a fraction of that. In towns across our state, working Montanans are being priced out of the communities they grew up in and want to pass on to their children.

Congress recently made some progress passing a significant federal housing bill, but we must do more. Montana cannot sit on the sidelines while this new legislation is implemented, and there's much more work to be done to make affordable housing within reach of every Montanan.

I'll fight to:

- Ensure Montana gets its share of the new federal grant money for cutting red tape. Congress just made a $200 million a year program that rewards communities for faster permitting and better zoning, instead of dictating rules from Washington. That's the right

approach. But small Montana towns can't compete with big cities for this money without help. I'll push to get our communities the staff and support they need to actually win these grants.

- Target tax incentives for affordable and workforce housing development in rural and small-town Montana communities, where builders can't make the math work today.
- Oppose tariffs on lumber, steel, and other building materials that make every new home cost more. These tariffs undercut the progress Congress just made. It makes no sense to pass big housing reform with one hand and raise the price of every 2x4 with the other.
- Build on the incentive model Congress just proved can work. Reward states and communities that lead on housing reform instead of forcing one-size-fits-all rules from Washington. The new law only funds this for seven years and at a modest level. I'll fight to grow it and make it last, so Montana can plan for the long term.
- Explore down payment assistance through programs such as the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Development loans.
- Force Congress to actually address the skyrocketing national debt. Not only is it a moral failure to saddle our kids and grandkids with this burden, but our ever-increasing public debt also crowds out private borrowing and drives up interest rates for all of us.

(2) Healthcare & Reproductive Care

No Montanan should go bankrupt because they or a family member got sick. No Montanan should have to leave the state to get the care they need. Nearly two-thirds of Montana's rural hospitals have already been forced to cut services, and nearly a third are at risk of closing altogether. When a rural hospital closes, a town doesn't just lose its emergency room, it loses its largest employer.

I'll fight to:

- Extend health insurance affordability tax credits so Montana families, farmers, and ranchers—including the roughly 77,000 Montanans who buy coverage on the individual marketplace—aren't priced out of coverage while Congress plays politics.
- Protect rural hospital funding and oppose federal cuts that threaten Montana's critical access hospitals, and fix the Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates that chronically underpay rural providers for obstetrics and emergency care.
- Defend Medicaid expansion, which covers roughly 76,000 working Montanans and has helped keep every Montana rural hospital open. While also, opposing reckless cuts and paperwork traps that strip coverage from people who are working. The expansion was passed on a bipartisan basis in Helena and signed by Governor Gianforte.
- Make telehealth expansion permanent, ensuring audio-only options remain available for communities without reliable broadband. Concurrently, I will focus on investment in rural healthcare workforce incentives by specifically targeting student loan repayment, rural residency slots, and dedicated recruitment support to draw doctors, nurses, and mental health professionals to underserved areas.

- Protect the right of Montana women and their doctors to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions free from interference by people who will never live with the consequences.

(3) Education

Montana's future walks out of our high schools every spring, and too many don't come back. Montana's schools are quietly in crisis: more than 850 licensed teaching positions sat open heading into the last school year, forcing districts to issue emergency authorizations just to keep classrooms staffed. Montana's starting teacher salary ($34,476) ranks dead last in the nation, and 61% of our schools are in rural or remote areas where that shortage hits hardest. Meanwhile, districts from Missoula to Helena are cutting staff and deferring maintenance to make budgets work.

I spent the last eight years as President of the University of Montana trying to give young Montanans a reason to stay and build their futures in our state. During my tenure, I focused on teaching kids how to think, not what to think. We delivered on that promise by nearly doubling research funding, launching partnerships like Accelerate Montana to train thousands in high-demand trades, and driving a 20% surge in trade-school and certificate enrollments. I will carry to Washington the lessons I personally learned as an advocate for public higher education that benefits all Montanans.

I'll fight to:

- Push for federal rural education funding that goes directly to classroom instruction and teacher pay, not bureaucracy, and expand federal loan forgiveness for teachers who commit to high-need rural Montana schools.
- Invest in trade and vocational programs alongside four-year degrees, so that a welding certificate is treated with the same respect as a diploma.
- Strengthen public higher education and apprenticeship pathways so that Montana's youth can build their futures right here at home and so that we retain our Montana talent. This requires expanding support for the rural broadband and connectivity investments that make modern career and technical education possible in our small towns.
- Fully fund rural K-12 schools and fight for federal rural school support, including programs like REAP, that Montana currently receives too little of relative to its needs.

(4) Public Lands & the Second Amendment

Montana's Constitution declares an inalienable right for every Montanan to a clean and healthful environment. Our public lands are our common ground where everyone – regardless of wealth or social status – can hunt, fish, and recreate. The natural treasures of our state have been handed down for generations, and it's our collective responsibility to steward for future generations.

Unfortunately, we've seen repeated attempts to sell or transfer public lands and we've witnessed the agencies responsible for caring for them gutted by non-strategic budget cuts.

I'll fight to:

- Oppose any transfer or sale of public lands to private or out-of-state interests. That includes fighting and voting against any reconciliation bill or budget provision that uses public lands as a bargaining chip to pay for unrelated spending. That includes not giving away mining opportunities to foreign entities.
- Prioritize and support land acquisitions of high value to the Montana public to provide more public access and recreation opportunities.
- Protect access for hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation on public land, and make sure Montana communities have a real say when development or resource extraction is proposed near the places they live. That means standing up to corporate donors or Washington bureaucrats who seek to foist their agenda on Montana.
- Reverse the damaging cuts to federal agencies charged with caring for our public lands and conducting the research necessary to be responsible stewards of resources for future generations.
- Support active management of our forests in the wildland urban interface to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and provide safety for our wildland firefighters while also supporting little to no management in specially designated areas (e.g., wilderness areas).
- Defend the Second Amendment rights of the hunters, ranchers, and sportsmen who've never needed a permission slip from Washington to responsibly own a firearm.

(5) Honoring Tribal Communities & Cultural Heritage

Montana's thirteen federally recognized Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with deep roots in this land, extraordinary cultures, and valuable ways of knowing. Honoring treaty rights and Tribal sovereignty is not a partisan issue — it is a legal obligation embedded in the Constitution and a moral commitment that predates statehood. Building reciprocal, respectful partnerships with Tribal Nations isn't just the right thing to do. It's the foundation for a future that works for everyone in Montana.

I'll fight to:

- Honor treaty and trust obligations as the binding commitments they are, not optional line items.
- Push for equal access to healthcare, infrastructure, and law enforcement resources on Tribal lands.
- Ensure Tribal governments are genuinely consulted, not just notified, on decisions affecting their land, water, and people — including energy and resource development proposed near reservation land. Recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge in public land management.
- Protect the Tribal health system and Indian Health Service facilities by fighting that they receive the funding and flexibility they need to serve Indian Country.

(6) Veterans

I've worn the uniform, and I know what we owe the people who wore it beside me. Montana has one of the highest veteran suicide rates in the nation (53.9 per 100,000, compared to a national

rate of 35.2) and VA Montana has lost nearly 9% of its total workforce since late 2024, as political bureaucrats in Washington cut positions for physicians, nurses, and psychologists to meet arbitrary staffing quotas that have nothing to do with what Montana veterans actually need.

I'll fight to:

- Fully fund rural VA clinics and defend VA healthcare so veterans aren't driving half the state for basic care only to be—far too often—let down, with particular focus on mobile clinics and telehealth for Montana's most remote communities.
- Cut the bureaucratic backlog and end the hiring crisis that keeps earned benefits and timely care out of veterans' hands.
- Expand veteran mental health services, including peer support and community-based counseling designed for veterans least likely to ask for help, and ensure the VA meets the specific needs of women veterans, including military sexual trauma treatment and maternity care.
- Preserve and strengthen the HUD-VASH program to keep roofs over the heads of Montana veterans, and champion programs and employer incentives that help veterans build civilian careers and launch small businesses in Montana's rural communities.
- Make sure the country that asked for their service keeps its word.

(7) Retiring With Dignity

Montanans who worked their whole lives shouldn't spend their final years worrying about whether Social Security and Medicare will still be there.

I'll fight to:

- Keep the promises made to Montana seniors, and strengthen the program's long-term solvency through fairer contributions from the highest earners, not by cutting benefits for working Montanans.
- Defend Medicare against harmful changes, including any effort to raise the eligibility age or shift costs onto beneficiaries, while maintaining Medicare reimbursement rates for rural providers so seniors in small communities keep access to their local doctors.
- Confront reckless Washington spending that puts these earned programs at risk in the first place.
- Ensure that the people who built this state can retire in it with dignity, not anxiety.