



Big Sky 55+
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In 1997, in the landmark *Armstrong v. Mazurek* case, the Montana Supreme Court held that a woman's right to choose to have an abortion, and her right to obtain an abortion from a health care provider of her choice, were protected by the state constitutional right to privacy.

ABORTION IS A PARENTING DECISION

by Jeannie Reeves-Hansen

we find ourselves searching for a path forward that will solidify all individuals' rights to healthcare, procreative autonomy, and privacy.

What threatens this path forward is the fact that **Republicans are two seats away from obtaining a supermajority in the Montana Legislature, which means we would no longer have the guarantee of the Montana Constitution to protect our reproductive rights**, as we have since 1972 when the bi-partisan, fair-minded, Constitutional Convention ensured as much. Montana is envied not only because of our Constitutional protections for a clean and healthful environment, but also because our politics has historically reflected this value. Not any more.

Out of touch right-wing ideologues are intent on systematically stripping away women's rights. They aim to impose minority rule on Montana through sheer power of force. Blurring the line of separation of church and state through the appointment of extremist judges, Governor Gianforte and the Republican led legislature have already begun their assault on our independent judiciary. **Governor Gianforte has already signed three bills into law that prohibit or limit access to abortion care.** These laws are currently being challenged in court. Having good

stewards who honor and will protect our constitutional and human rights is our only path forward.

Nothing about restricting women's access to healthcare, including abortion rights, aligns with our Montana values. In fact, it is a blatant violation of our human rights. My entire life I have felt a safety in Montana, unparalleled by any other place, but with the current threatening actions and divisive rhetoric coming from our state and national leadership, I feel the safety slipping away. **Women must continue to be able to make the most important parenting decision they ever will.**

Jeannie Reeves-Hansen is Political & Advocacy Coordinator for Big Sky 55+. Previously, she worked as a community and medical social worker, and in donor relations and patron services with the Great Falls Symphony. She and her husband raise Black Angus cattle in the foothills of the Little Belt Mountains. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Public Administration. Contact: jeannie@bigsky55.org

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Montana's Constitution at work

YOUR RIGHT TO A CLEAN & HEALTHFUL ENVIRONMENT

by Jeanne-Marie Souvigney

Montana's Blackfoot River and Paradise Valley, two of the state's most cherished landscapes, might be very different today if not for Montanans' constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment. That protection, found in Articles II and IX of Montana's Constitution, declares that Montanans have an inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment, and the state and the legislature have an obligation to maintain, improve and protect that environment from unreasonable depletion and degradation.

In two separate cases, the Supreme Court found the Montana legislature passed laws that were unconstitutional: in one case, by allowing a blanket exemption from the state's water non-degradation policy without regard to the harm caused by certain water discharges, and in the other, by allowing a project – in this instance, mine exploration above Chico Hot Springs – to proceed even though environmental impacts were unknown and the project was being challenged in court. The environmental damage in both places could have been irreversible and remedies too late to make a difference, threatening these landscapes that provide health and happiness, fish and wildlife habitat, and support business operations and other private property pursuits.



Some Montana legislators are irritated that their laws allowing unknown levels of pollution and environmental damage have been declared unconstitutional. They're willing to take big risks with Montana's water quality – think drinking water or fish in our streams – and air and soils so that businesses and corporations can make more profits more quickly, at the expense of current and future Montanans. **These legislators want to rewrite Montana's Constitution to eliminate our current inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment.**

If you think one Berkeley Pit, 16 current superfund sites, thousands of asbestos victims – just to name a few examples – already reflect too much environmental degradation in Montana, demand that legislators support our Constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment. **Vote against those who want to dirty our air and water and soils,** leaving Montana a much worse place for all of us.

Jeanne-Marie Souvigney co-founded Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund and Park County Environmental Council, spent decades lobbying the legislature on environmental and voting rights issues, and is a current member of the MCVEF Board and the Livingston Parks & Trails Committee.

Inflation Reduction Act

PRESCRIPTION DRUG SAVINGS

by Senator Jon Tester

Last month, Congress listened to Montanans and passed some of the most significant, targeted legislation we've seen in decades – the Inflation Reduction Act.

After hearing D.C. politicians talk about making prescription drugs more affordable for years, we finally passed legislation that puts Montana's seniors and working families before corporate lobbyists and massive pharmaceutical companies.

With the Inflation Reduction Act, we're **holding these billion-dollar corporations accountable and cutting health care costs for Montana seniors** with common sense steps like:

- Requiring Medicare to use its purchasing power to negotiate for fairer prescription drug prices for seniors, like any business deal between buyer and seller
- Capping out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for Medicare patients at \$2,000 per year, and
- Capping the cost of insulin for Medicare patients at \$35 per month,

Requiring Medicare to negotiate drug prices will prevent multinational pharmaceutical companies from price gouging seniors.

Capping out of pocket drug costs will give folks the stability needed to live comfortably on fixed income and plan for the future.

And **capping insulin prices for Medicare recipients** means that folks won't have to pay an arm and a leg for this critical, life-saving drug.

This happened because Montana's seniors have demanded access to affordable health care, and Congress listened.

This law doesn't raise taxes on any Montanans, will ultimately put more money back in *your* pocket – and we did it all by making the largest corporations pay their fair share.

From requiring the negotiation of Medicare drug prices, to bolstering the United States' energy independence, this law will lower costs and fight inflation – and that's according to nonpartisan groups like the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and Moody Analytics.

I'm proud to stand by this law, and appreciate the support of the folks at Big Sky 55 that helped make it happen.



by Jim Nelson

For fifty years we Montanans have taken for granted the guarantees protected by our State's Constitution, including rights to:

- A clean and healthful environment
- Individual dignity
- Participate in our government
- Vote in free and open elections without interference from the government
- Individual privacy in matters of reproductive choice, in the security of our personal data, and in personal autonomy, to name just a few.

For fifty years our Constitution has served as a bulwark — protecting *We the People's* rights to popular sovereignty and self-government from the incursions, manipulations and interference of partisan, sectarian, and special interests. There was a clear separation of powers among the three branches of government and a respect for the Constitution and the rule of law.

But that time has now come to an end. We are now governed by politicians and partisan/theocratic interests with fascist leanings, bent on protecting the power of the members of the cult by disenfranchising ordinary citizens with the fraud and the lie of being on our side.

In the upcoming 2023 legislative session there will be a concerted effort to amend the Constitution to do away with or severely restrict those rights I mentioned above, and more. There will be a concerted effort to turn our democracy into a fascist, authoritarian regime.

We can no longer take our Constitution for granted. We must stand and defend it! Start by voting against these forces of evil!

Jim Nelson is a retired Montana Supreme Court Justice. Previously, he practiced law in Cut Bank, served as the Glacier County Attorney, taught as an adjunct professor at Montana's Law school, and has been an outspoken advocate for Montana's Constitution and for civil rights.



Montana's unique Constitution recognizes a right that was found in no other state constitution at the time it was written in 1972: the right of each of us to a life that supports our dignity. Our Constitution states that "The dignity of the human being is inviolable."

RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

by Jon Ellingson

An essential element of human dignity is the right to bodily autonomy. This brings me to the issue of the day: abortion rights.

When the US Supreme Court overruled *Roe v Wade*, it rejected precedent of fifty years that guided women in making the most important and intimate decisions of their lives. By abandoning *Roe*, the **Supreme Court stripped women of the right to make those decisions herself and transferred those rights to the government.**

The Montana Supreme Court recognized these rights in the *Armstrong* case. Anti-abortion activists have called on the Court to overrule the case.

The zealots have taken a fixed aim against the rights that the *Armstrong* case recognized. Their strategy is three fold. One focuses on statutory restrictions. The second envisions amending our Constitution. The third hopes to elect a compliant lackey to the Supreme Court who would vote to overrule *Armstrong*.

The upcoming election will tell whether any of these strategies will bear fruit. **A top priority is the reelection of Ingrid Gustafson.** She must win her Supreme Court race against James Brown, who was recruited by Governor Greg Gianforte to advance the extremists' agenda.

On the legislative side, the Republicans must be prevented from reaching a total of 100 legislators in the next session. If they reach that number they will be able to submit constitutional amendments to the voters.

The importance of the next election cannot be overstated. The state must be prevented from invading the intimate space of a woman as she charts her reproductive life. I don't like to speak with a partisan tone, but frankly **a vote for a Republican now is a vote in favor of restricted abortion rights.**

Let's respect the dignity of Montana women. Let's respect their right to bodily autonomy. Let's get out the vote and **elect only those who will respect a woman's right** to make the most intimate and personal decisions of her life on her own, without interference from the state.

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