



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

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## Dale & Vai

### WELCOME TO THE TEAM!

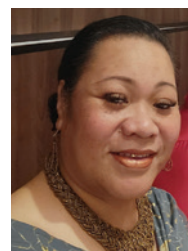
**Dale Moore** joined Big Sky 55+ in April. Dale is a fourth generation Great Falls native, currently raising the fifth generation there. He attended Our Lady of Lourdes, then Great Falls High School and finished at University of Great Falls.



Dale worked for 14 years in the Great Falls elections office and is well-versed in the intricacies of our electoral process. Regarding his new role, Dale said, "This is the first time that I have taken a role this active in the political space and I am very excited to now be working at Big Sky 55+."

In his free time, he enjoys working on his vehicles and off-roading around their family cabin.

**Vaiamoe Mounga** (Vai for short) is from Tacoma where she has worked as an organizer for Service Employees International Union (SEIU) for the past 9 years. Prior to that, she was a direct care worker in senior long term care.



Vai understands first-hand the challenges of long-term care policies and politics!

Vai will work on issue canvassing with our volunteers and canvass crews and will be organizing Big Sky 55+ members for educational events and activities "engaging our Superpowers!"

One of Vai's hobbies listed on her resumé is "toppling unjust hierarchies!"

We look forward to working with Dale and Vai!

#### BIG SKY 55+ BOARD MEMBERS

**CHAIR**  
Terry Minow, *Boulder*

**VICE CHAIR**  
Jon Ellingson, *Missoula*

**TREASURER**  
Pat Sweeney, *Billings*

**SECRETARY**  
Pam Carroll, *Great Falls*  
Barbara Archer, *Billings*  
Bill Bronson, *Great Falls*  
Elizabeth Marum, *Belgrade*

Alma McCormick, *Crow Nation*

Sanna Porte, *Helena*

Sharon Stewart Peregoy, *Crow Nation (ON LEAVE)*

Dennis Taylor, *Helena*

#### BIG SKY 55+ STAFF

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Margie MacDonald

**MEMBERSHIP & SPECIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR**  
Jeannie Reeves-Hansen

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR**  
Lila Cleminshaw

**POLITICAL DIRECTOR**  
Faith Scow

**GREAT FALLS ORGANIZER**  
Dale Moore

**CANVASS DIRECTOR**  
Vai Mounga



## Who is Big Sky 55+?

Formed in 2018, Big Sky 55+ organizes Montanans 55 and over to work for solutions that advance the common good such as Social Security and affordable health care. We organize seniors to build a strong voice in our communities. We provide trustworthy information to seniors. We change who is making the laws by getting involved in elections.

#### OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS INCLUDE:

We organized a **Fair Tax Rally** in October 2023 in the Capitol Rotunda to call attention to increases in residential property taxes and the significant tax burden shift from large corporations onto homeowners, many on limited or fixed incomes. The increases came about when the Governor and the legislative supermajority failed to adjust rates after historic increases in home values.

We successfully worked to **raise reimbursement rates for long-term care** in Montana stemming a tide of nursing home closures (2023).

During the 2023 Legislature we held five **virtual "town halls"** to educate and engage our members. Topics included the viability of Montana's senior long-term care facilities, fair taxes (both property and income), protecting our beloved Montana Constitution, among other timely updates.

We held our first **statewide conference**, "Gathering Wisdom, Building Power" in March of 2024 to showcase the "Superpowers" of Montanans 55 and over, to inform our members, and to mobilize our energies on key strategies and issues: health care, combating misinformation, fair taxes, Social Security, and access to a continuum of care and services for older Montanans.

We initiated an interim **legislative study of how to support Montana's older adults living independently**, as well as how to provide the appropriate level of residential options and services ranging from home- and community-based care, to assisted living, to skilled nursing care.

We sponsored two months-long **Central Montana Leadership Institutes** (2022 and 2023) to strengthen leaders and activists in and around Great Falls.

We have worked on federal reforms including significantly **lowering costs of prescription medicines**.

We publish a **quarterly newsletter** and timely, focused, **weekly emails** that provide action opportunities for members.

We pen **frequent and timely op-eds** that are widely published in the Montana press on issues like Social Security, fair taxes, senior long-term care, affordable housing, and protecting Montana's Constitution from concerted efforts to erode our rights.

With our allies, we have invested years of effort to **help Great Falls and Cascade County citizens** push back against extreme and incompetent local and state elected officials.

We **endorse champions** for older Montanans and for our wider Montana communities in local, state and national elections.



#### BS55+ STAFF AND BOARD RETREAT, JUNE 2024

Front (L to R): Bill Bronson (Great Falls), Vai Mounga (Great Falls), Elizabeth Marum (Belgrade), Barbara Archer (Billings). Middle (L to R): Jon Ellingson (Missoula), Lila Cleminshaw (Missoula), Gail Stoltz (Helena), Pamela Carroll (Great Falls), Terry Minow (Boulder), Margie MacDonald (Billings), Pat Sweeney (Billings), Teresa Erickson (Facilitator-Billings), Jeannie Reeves Hansen (Raynesford). Back (L to R): Dale Moore (Great Falls), Faith Scow (Butte).



**MONDAY, JULY 29**

**Glendive** Noon-1pm,  
DCC, Ullman Center Lecture Hall

**Miles City** 5pm-6pm,  
Sleep Inn, Tongue River Rm

**TUESDAY, JULY 30**

**Red Lodge** 11:30am-12:30pm,  
Roosevelt Center, Community Rm

**Billings** 5pm-6pm,  
Billings Public Library, Comm. Rm

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 31**

**Lewistown** 11:30am-12:30pm,  
Yogo Inn, Snowy & Judith Rms

**Great Falls** 4:30pm-5:30pm,  
GF Public Library, Cordingly Rm

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 1**

**Helena** 11:30am-12:30pm,  
St. Paul's UMC

**Missoula** 5pm-6pm,  
Homeward, Solstice Bldg,  
1535 Liberty Ln

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 2**

**Butte** 11:30am-12:30pm,  
Montana Tech, Copper Lounge

*Please check website  
for meeting updates.*

## EXPOSING MYTHS & ZOMBIE LIES ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

### Did you know that around half of all seniors in the U.S. rely on Social Security for most of their income?

In Montana the numbers are equally impressive. Social Security has been a godsend and a game changer ever since its founding in the 1930s under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And from the start, naysayers have tried to scare people into thinking it would not be there for them, that it was not, in fact, secure.

The naysayers are still at it today, and oftentimes journalists are taken in by the chorus of those voices that issue dire warnings about the Social Security system's future. Fortunately, there are people who know the true facts about Social Security that are pushing back on the naysayers' messages.



Alex Lawson, Executive Director of Social Security Works, is a national leading expert on Social Security. Social Security Works is a coalition made up of more than 340 national and state organizations representing over 50 million Americans. Alex spoke at our March statewide conference, and our audience felt they wanted more time to learn from and engage with such a knowledgeable presenter. So, we are bringing him back by popular demand, and he is coming to a location probably pretty close to you!

Alex is coming to Montana and will speak in nine communities during the week of July 28th (see schedule on this page). Please don't miss it! Use your 55+ Superpower to let your friends and family know, and we will look forward to seeing you at one of Alex's presentations!

At its June meeting the Big Sky 55+ Board unanimously endorsed the efforts of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority to increase daily long distance passenger rail in Montana, including reintroduction of the former Northcoast Hiawatha line across southern Montana, improvements and strengthening of service on the Empire Builder (currently Montana's only long distance Amtrak rail access), and North-South service from Billings to Denver.

## STRONG SUPPORT for PASSENGER RAIL for SOUTHERN MONTANA

### Background

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 directed the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), with conducting an Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service and the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes. The study will develop a prioritized inventory of capital projects and other actions required to restore or enhance the service, including cost estimates for those projects and actions. The federal rail study identifies two new long-distance routes through Montana as preferred, an east-west line connecting Seattle to Chicago and a north-south route connecting Billings to Denver.

In December 2023, the Biden Administration announced \$8.2 billion in new grants for rail for projects ready to be built and ones in the works, including planning dollars for improved service in Montana. The grants support improvements to the Empire Builder and a \$500,000 planning grant to propose reintroducing the Northcoast Hiawatha to offer twice daily service through southern Montana population centers.

According to a 2021 report from the Rail Passengers Association, restoration of the North Coast Hiawatha would generate \$271 million in economic benefits to seven states and cost Amtrak \$68 million to operate. The operation cost would be offset by \$41 million in fares and other customer revenue.

**Daily passenger rail service will help to revitalize and build sustainable communities across Montana, connect Montanans to family members, health care, cultural centers, education, and retail businesses, and serve the 25% of Americans who are not able to drive personal automobiles.**

The Big Sky 55+ platform supports infrastructure funding to keep rural communities and Montana viable and livable. It also supports policies to transition the nation away from fossil fuels. Passenger rail contributes significantly to both of those objectives.

## DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS ABOUT MEDICAID RECIPIENTS IN MONTANA

As we navigate through 2024, it's crucial to dispel myths about Medicaid recipients in Montana. Contrary to widespread beliefs, **a significant portion of Medicaid recipients are employed**, striving to make ends meet despite low wages and rising living costs. These hardworking Montanans rely on Medicaid to access essential healthcare services that enable them to stay in the workforce and would otherwise be unaffordable.

**Another common misconception is that Medicaid fosters dependency.** The truth is, Medicaid enables recipients to manage chronic conditions, maintain their health, and continue contributing to the workforce. This support is particularly important in rural areas, where healthcare options are often limited.

**Additionally, the belief that Medicaid recipients are predominantly young, healthy individuals exploiting the system is far from accurate.** Many recipients are seniors, individuals with disabilities, and children, all of whom rely on Medicaid for comprehensive, life-saving care.

By understanding these myths, we can foster a more informed perspective on Medicaid and its **critical role in supporting the health and well-being of Montanans.** Along with our community members and organizations like Montana Budget & Policy Center, and Alluvion Health, we will continue to provide factual information about Medicaid and advocate for policies that strengthen this essential program.

*Medicaid data provided by Montana Budget Policy Center, June 2024  
[https://mthf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-Medicaid-in-Montana-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://mthf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-Medicaid-in-Montana-Report_FINAL.pdf)*

**96% of Medicaid Enrollees Either Work or Face a Barrier to Work**  
Employment Status of Adult Medicaid Enrollees in Montana

