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We are conflating two issues: Election Integrity and the Stolen Election Conspiracy.

The issue of election security and integrity is really about whether mistakes can occur by voters and elections administrators, which is certainly the case because of simple human error, tabulator glitches, etc. The other issue is whether the 2020 election was stolen through a massive election fraud conspiracy.

Dedicated citizens and their representatives have been working continuously on improving elections for decades. This work has resulted in increased professionalism through such organizations as the Montana and the National Associations of Election Administrators. The passage of Federal laws has also mandated changes in State election laws to adopt minimum standards on voter education, registration, and ballots. I think elections are now fairer and more accurate than they have ever been. I also think our elections administrators in Montana, and across the nation, are honest civil servants and best exemplified by our Election Administrator, Regina Plettenberg.

Supporters of our former President are now putting pressure on Commissions across Montana to investigate allegations of voter fraud. In order to appease these people, you are now asking for permission from Secretary Jacobsen to audit local ballot issues. The people calling for investigating Montana elections are convinced there is election fraud because our former President said there was. Allegations about whether someone properly signed their affirmation envelope, or whether a voting machine has a glitch, are simply tactics to try to make the case for massive voter fraud because Trump lost the election. We saw this tactic in its most pure form in Missoula when Rep Tschida, and his Montana Election Integrity project, broadcasted to the world that there was a 4,592 vote overcount in Missoula after the group's chaotic recount of the affirmation envelopes. It was only after the Missoula Republican party paid \$5,000 to exhaustively recount the envelopes that the truth emerged: a 71-vote discrepancy or .09 percent, well within the margin of error for elections conducted by human beings.

To date no one has produced evidence of a coordinated conspiracy to throw any particular election in any particular direction. Where is the evidence of the conspiracy that would necessarily involve hundreds if not thousands of collaborators. The cottage industry of conspiracy theorists is in the beginning stage of manufacturing scenarios that could make all this even conceptually plausible. This includes Dinesh D'Souza's documentary about stuffed ballot boxes. The Montana Election Integrity Project promotes junior data analyst Seth Keshel's assertions that Montana had 65,000 extra votes because his statistical model says so, even

though election analyst universally say his models are wrong. But these insurgents don't need to prove anything. They just need to make allegations to undermine voter confidence and as justification for a partisan power grab in the next legislative session.

I also understand that there is a bi-partisan working group of legislators meeting to discuss improvements. Our electoral system could use some real reforms instead of more voter suppression. The legislature passed some bad bills in the last session that banned same day voter registration and decreased access to the ballot box for working people, seniors, the disabled, tribal members and students. Most of these laws are now being challenged in court but one truly good piece of legislation did pass with bi-partisan support. The law to mandate yearly updates to the voter file is the kind of legislation we should be focusing on and hopefully the type of legislation being considered by this working group.

The bi-partisan working group aims to channel this concern about our elections into a push for useful legislation. But I think there is a serious problem with trying to ignore these irresponsible claims of wide-spread voter fraud. Firstly, it spreads ignorance about our election system. I wager that many of those who have been crowding Commissioner's offices in counties state-wide, actually believe that you can print up ballots, put fictitious names on them, and they will be counted. D'Souza's documentary about "1,000 mules" spreads hysteria about people dropping off more than one ballot at polling places, but every one of those ballots must be repeatedly cross checked with a registered voter on the voter file. The days of stuffing ballot boxes ended with the 1950s.

The most serious problem is that undermining confidence in our election system threatens the foundation of our Republic. That foundation rests on two key democratic norms, the loyal opposition and institutional forbearance. The loyal opposition accepts the legitimacy of their political opponents and therefore respects the outcome of elections. Institutional forbearance means that the ruling party will not use the extraordinary power it has to corrupt the election process in their favor. Without these two democratic norms government, at all levels, loses its legitimacy and the alternative is conflict.

As the loyal opposition, I call on the ruling party in Montana, the Republican Party, to show leadership and denounce those spreading unfounded conspiracy theories of a stolen election and I applaud those already doing so.