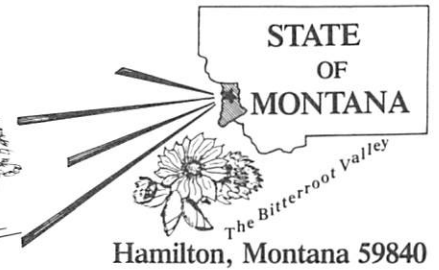
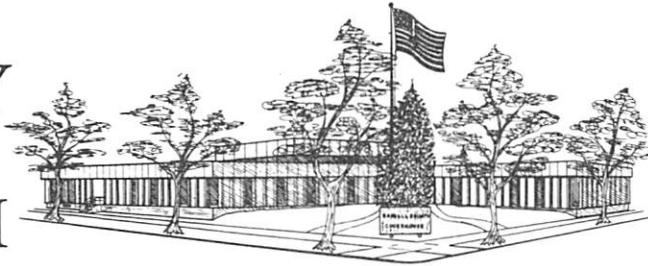


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



Ravalli County Commissioners – 215 S. 4th Street, Suite A

Hamilton, MT. 59840 406-375-6500

commissioners@rc.mt.gov

February 21, 2017

The Ravalli County Commissioners are writing this letter in support of SB 305. Ravalli County has conducted numerous successful **mail ballot** elections over the last 25 years for municipal, fire, irrigation, and school district trustee elections. These elections have included levy and bond issues. In fact, most bond elections are run by mail. The average turnout for mail ballot elections is 45% or higher, even on ballots that contain only trustee races. Held at the polls, these same trustee elections would likely yield a 20% turnout. Voting by mail has become more popular, which is demonstrated by the increasing number of absentee voters. In the 2016 General Election absentee voters cast nearly 60% of votes counted in Ravalli County.

Currently, we do not know for sure if this special election will be held, nor has a date been established. It is very difficult to plan a poll election when you do not have a date. For our large federal and state elections we know the date and start planning for these elections two years in advance. Without knowing a date, traditional poll locations may not be secured. Our Election Administrator cannot provide a date to potential poll workers to schedule and assure their availability. This makes running a successful poll election nearly impossible. Mail ballot elections are easier to plan and execute with the stringent timelines required under Montana's special congressional vacancy election laws.

Mail ballot elections are safe and secure. Every active voter will receive a ballot along with detailed instructions on how to return their voted ballot to the Election Office. There will be staffed drop sites on Election Day throughout the county for those voters who do not wish to mail their ballot. Replacement ballots will be available at the County Election Office for any voter who spoils or does not receive their ballot. When an absentee or mail ballot is received, every ballot is examined and the signature is matched and verified to the signature on file for each voter. If the signature does not match, the ballot is rejected and the voter is contacted.

Since elections are funded solely at the county level, County Commissioners are responsible to their taxpayers to run these elections in the manner that is both best for the voters and fiscally responsible to the taxpayers. We believe mail ballot election fulfils both of those obligations. In Ravalli County we will save \$12,000 by running this special election by mail. Overall, counties (and taxpayers) anticipate a statewide savings in excess of \$500,000 if this a mail ballot election.

At this time, we are simply addressing the Congressional special election. When taking all factors into account, it would seem to be a clear-cut decision to run this special election by mail ballot. Ravalli County Commissioners request the Legislators and Governor of Montana approve a special mail ballot election to replace U.S. Representative Ryan Zinke.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration on this important matter,

Ravalli County Commissioners

Greg Chilcott, Ray Hawk, Jeff Burrows, Chris Hoffman, Doug Schallenberger

Handwritten signature of Greg Chilcott in blue ink, followed by the text "Chair".