

11-27-2016

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Recommended Citation

Barrett, Evan, "Montana Values Prevail Over Six Million Dollar Man" (2016). *Highlands College*. 87.
http://digitalcommons.mtech.edu/lib_studies/87

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Montana Values Prevail Over Six Million Dollar Man

A Column by Evan Barrett

November 27, 2016

In 1978 Max Baucus was elected to the US Senate starting a record 35 years of representing Montana. In 1978, Pat Williams was elected to the first of a record nine consecutive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. Also in 1978, something happened in New York City that foreshadowed a political event in Montana 38 years later. In 1978 the ABC television network cancelled the prime time show "The Six Million Dollar Man."

"The Six Million Dollar Man" was a successful science fiction television series starring Lee Majors who portrayed a former astronaut who had acquired superhuman strength from bionic implants and then became a US government secret agent.

This year in Montana the "Six Million Dollar Man" event occurred when GOP gubernatorial candidate Greg Gianforte put an unprecedented amount of his personal fortune, nearly \$6 million, into his campaign. But, Montana rejected its political "Six Million Dollar Man" while his show was still in tryouts -- it never made prime time in the Treasure State.

Gianforte spent \$5.8 million of his own money to persuade Montanans that he was just another regular Montanan. You may have noticed the effort after being assaulted by what the Center for Public Integrity has documented as a nationally-high 38,193 Gianforte broadcast television ads, which does not include ads on cable TV, radio or the internet.

In spite of the spending, Governor Bullock won with 255,933 votes (50.2%) while Gianforte got 236,115 (46.4%). Gianforte spent \$24.56 of his personal money on each and every person who voted for him -- almost \$25 for each vote. In saying "no" to the Six Million Dollar Man, Montana once again said it is "not for sale."

Montana didn't just reject Gianforte's expensive bid, they voted FOR Governor Bullock based upon his prudent fiscal management, the strong economy he nurtured and his long-standing commitment to Montana values. Almost 26,000 more votes were cast for Governor this year than in 2012. Governor Bullock got 3 of every 4 additional votes cast. He is a "majority" governor winning over 50% of the vote. His 19,818 vote margin of victory exceeded the vote total for the Libertarian ticket, taking away any charge that the Libertarian vote got him elected.

And the Governor talked straight with the people of Montana. Recall that Governor Ted Schwinden was elected back in 1980 and 1984 under the banner "Straight Talk – Good People." Montanans value that characteristic

But, Gianforte fell short on straight talk. As he was lavishly spending his millions, he was also spending his entire campaign trying to obscure where he stood on many issues important to voters.

When asked by workers if he would support or sign any form of so-called "right-to-work" which hurts workers and wages, his non-answer was "it's not one of my top priorities." Not straight talk.

When asked by women if he would de-fund Planned Parenthood which provides medical services to over 13,000 Montanans, his non-answer was "I don't have any plans right now." No straight talk there, either.

When confronted with his previous support of a general sales tax, he pretended it was a one-time event, while it was his mantra for a number of years. And then he poured thousands into ads charging the Governor with sales tax support. Again, not straight talk.

It came out that Gianforte had put up a fence with a “no-trespassing” sign and filed suit against the state of Montana to deny access to the East Gallatin River through a properly granted easement. He denied it and tried to obscure it by pouring millions into persuading us that he was Montana’s #1 outdoorsman. Straight talk?

Now, I personally like Greg Gianforte, but I was disappointed that he didn’t stand tall in support of his personal values, even though I disagree with most of them. He has privately poured millions into causes such as allowing discrimination of Montana’s LGBT citizens, denying women the ability to make their own reproductive healthcare choices, advancing anti-science causes such as the creationist dinosaur museum that turns science and history onto its head, and unconstitutionally channeling your tax dollars to religious schools. He told us to “pay no attention” to these private causes.

Montanans were not fooled.

Evan Barrett of Butte, will soon be retiring after 47 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He currently writes columns and commentaries, is an award-winning producer of Montana history films at Montana Tech/Highlands College and occasionally teaches. These are his personal views.

(700 words in the body)