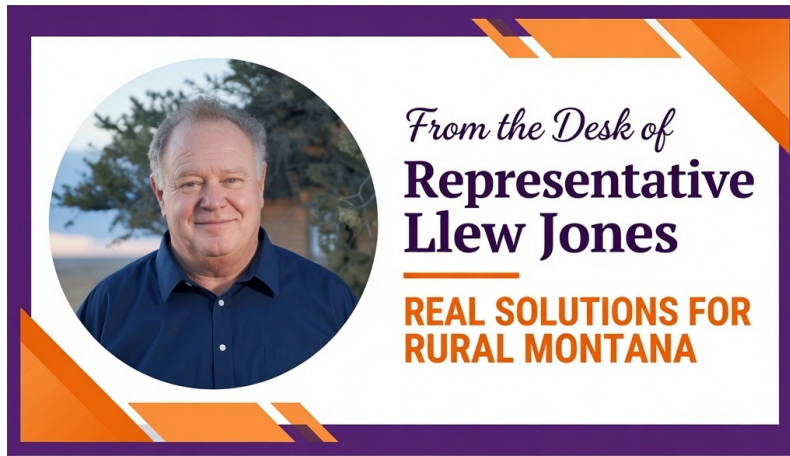




Montana Voters Chose. The Party Bosses Want a Do-Over.

By Rep. Llew Jones · August 2026

We knocked most every door in this district three times, from Sweetgrass to the north Helena Valley.

Local folks took time out of calving, feeding, and running their businesses to knock doors, make phone calls, write checks, and build our grassroots campaign. My wife and my family gave up a year of weekends and worked long hours on the campaign.



Volunteers working the doors in a spring snow. Not paid door knockers — neighbors, family, and folks who took time out of calving and feeding to help.

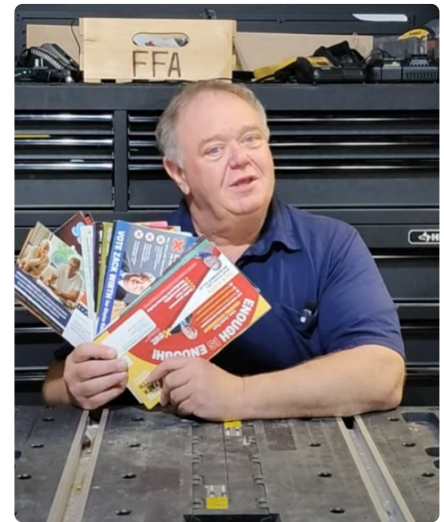
Photo: Jones campaign.

Out-of-state dark money groups and party bosses spent more than a million dollars on an ugly race promoting a candidate who would put the bosses and their big donors first — about \$150 for every vote cast. On June 2 the people chose. We won fair and square, by 252 votes. In Montana the ballot box should have been the end of it.

It was not.

Frustrated by that expensive loss, Party Boss Matt Regier went to the Attorney General on July 9 asking for a legal technicality to make an end run around the voters. Ballot eligibility is the Secretary of State's job. A previous Attorney General settled this exact question in 2012. Knudsen should have declined, but chose to weigh in anyway with an opinion that would keep Fitzpatrick and me off the ballot — issued without the customary notice to the people affected, after the write-in deadline had already passed, and only days before the August 20 certification.

Term limits in the Constitution are straightforward. The House and the Senate are two different offices. Eight years in any sixteen as a representative. Eight years in any sixteen as a senator. A legislator who moves between them starts over as a freshman, giving up the gavel and the seniority so newer members get their turn. What is not lost is the experience: the history behind a bill, the real cost of a bad idea, and the knowledge that keeps a well-paid lobbyist from selling the same broken product four sessions later.

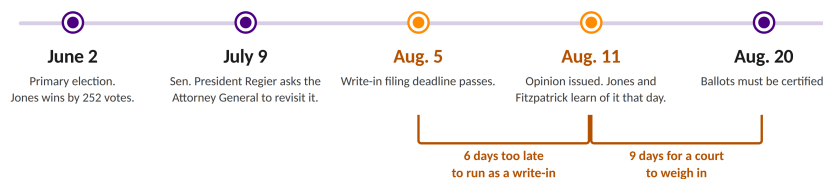


A share of the out-of-state mail sent into Senate District 9.

Photo: Jones campaign.

Montana voters chose on June 2. Here is what followed.

Senate District 9 · House District 24



THE REMEDY THE OPINION ITSELF OFFERS

The Attorney General's opinion points to **write-in candidacy** as the remedy for anyone kept off the ballot. That option had already closed on August 5 — six days before the opinion issued.

Sources: Montana Secretary of State 2026 candidate calendar; Attorney General Opinion, Aug. 11, 2026; § 13-12-201, MCA.

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The sequence, in order. The remedy the opinion itself points to — running as a write-in — had already closed six days before the opinion issued.

Sources: Montana Secretary of State 2026 candidate calendar; Attorney General Opinion, Aug. 11, 2026; § 13-12-201, MCA.

This is a citizen legislature, not Congress. A congressman serves a year for every year in office. Here it takes eight years to reach one. We meet ninety days every two years, so a full eight-year run is four sessions — 360 days in Helena, total. Run experienced legislators out and you have not reformed anything. You have handed the place to the lobbyists, the party bosses, and the bureaucracy — who are never termed out.

Fred Thomas, often called the father of Montana term limits, led the official argument urging a “yes” vote in the 1992 voter pamphlet mailed to every household. He then served eight years in the Senate, sat out eight, returned to that same Senate, and was elected Majority Leader. So either the man who sold Montana on term limits did not understand what he was selling, or this new reading is wrong.

Same constitutional words. Two Attorneys General. Opposite answers.

Article IV, Section 8 · Montana legislative term limits

2012 – 2026

Opinion of a previous Attorney General — the standing precedent

THE RULE

A candidate may file for office if, at the time he begins to serve, he will have had an eight-year break in service over a sixteen-year period.

Applied by Montana Secretaries of State for fourteen years. Legislators of both parties relied on it, and were certified under it.

AUGUST 2026

Opinion of the current Attorney General

THE RULE NOW

Eight years outside an office, standing alone, does not restore ballot eligibility. The sixteen-year count runs to the end of the term already in progress when the ballot is certified.

Issued August 11, 2026 — six days after the write-in filing deadline closed, and nine days before ballots must be certified.

WHICH READING DID THE VOTERS ADOPT IN 1992?

Fred Thomas — whose name led the official argument urging a “yes” vote in the 1992 voter pamphlet mailed to every Montana household — later served eight years in the Montana Senate, sat out eight years, returned to that same Senate, and was elected Majority Leader.

Sources: 54 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 4 (2012); Attorney General Opinion, Aug. 11, 2026; Montana Secretary of State.

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The same constitutional words, read two ways by two Attorneys General — one applied for fourteen years, one issued this month.

Sources: 54 Op. Att’y Gen. No. 4 (2012); Attorney General Opinion, Aug. 11, 2026; Montana Secretary of State.

Steve Fitzpatrick said it plainer than I would.

“Llew Jones went out and won his election fair and square. For Matt Regier, because he lost the race, to go cry to Austin Knudsen is absolutely outrageous. It is the ultimate loser move.”

— House Majority Leader Steve Fitzpatrick, to the Montana State News Bureau



The crew that carried this district — friends, family, and neighbors who gave up their evenings and weekends.

Photo: Jones campaign.

Understand what is really being targeted here. Steve Fitzpatrick and I both lead groups of legislators who put the folks back home ahead of the party bosses and the out-of-state donors who write the party big checks. Our independence angers people who would rather buy a delegation than persuade one. The party-before-people crowd lost at the ballot box, so they now look to win by way of a like-minded Attorney General's legal opinion. I take it as a badge of honor to be targeted for prioritizing those I represent, as every legislator should.

We will make our case in court if we can get filed in time. But the strongest term limit ever written is not in any opinion. It is a neighbor who knows your name, knows your record, and can retire you at the ballot box. Around here, folks know what I stand for.

To everyone who invested in and stood with me this last year, who called, who set a friend straight at the coffee shop, who knocked one more door — thank you, and keep the faith. The people had their say in June. I intend to see that it counts.

Focused on Real Solutions for Rural Montana,

Rep. Llew Jones

Rep. Llew Jones · Conrad, Montana · Republican Nominee, Senate District 9

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