

Gianforte, Not Bullock, Has Real Montanan Values Related to Access

Gianforte best reflects Montana values relating to public access and property rights

By Hertha L. Lund // Jul 22, 2016 //

Often times the first casualty in politics is the truth. Currently, the Democrats are using out-of-state dark money to bastardize the truth relating to Greg Gianforte and stream access issues. In reality, Gianforte's approach to stream access is the ideal balance between public access and property rights, which is where most Montanans position themselves.

Yes, it is correct that in 2009 Gianforte filed to Quiet Title against the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) due to a factual and legal discrepancy of where the public access should be on Gianforte's property. This type of suit is a common tool for landowners to use in order to allow the courts to sort out these types of factual and legal issues. Instead of serving the suit, Gianforte's attorney sent FWP letters and emails. FWP corrected their mistake, moved the access point, provided fencing and worked with Gianforte to allow public access and protection of private property rights.

Instead of being against public access, as the Democrats are alleging in ads, and as proclaimed by Gov. Steve Bullock, Gianforte actually worked to provide the public with better access while protecting his property rights. This is the real Montanan position.

It is Bullock who is out of touch with Montanans. In 2012, Bullock used his position as attorney general to bully a rancher in White Sulphur Springs to provide public access over his private property where public access does not exist. This issue is still being litigated. It is Bullock who has sided with out-of-state interests and money to work against rural Montanans who are part of Montanans' agricultural tradition. Agriculture is still the No. 1 contributor to the economy in Montana.

I wrote in an op-ed published in 2012 in the Great Falls Tribune in which I said, "Montana Attorney General Steve Bullock is misusing his office, being a bully and not speaking accurately regarding his plans to engender better landowner relationships with the public for access to hunting and fishing while suing a family ranch for dubious public access. If Bullock really cared about Montanans and their constitutional rights, he would have attempted to use his position to negotiate a deal between the Forest Service and Zehntner, instead of using his office to file a questionable lawsuit to gain press for his political campaign."

Many farmers and ranchers in Montana allow fishing access on their private property like Gianforte because they value their neighbors. Unfortunately, it is the out-of-state money and

extremists who are wrecking the traditional relationship and trust between Montana landowners and those who seek access across private property to pursue their recreational activities.

The recent ad run by the Democratic Governors Association is really an attack on Montana values cleverly disguised as a fishing story. Even though Bullock may have been born in Montana, he is the candidate that is out of touch with Montana values relating to public access and private property rights.

The record on this issue is clear: Gianforte best reflects Montana values relating to public access and property rights. It is Bullock who does not understand private property rights or how to develop a good relationship between landowners and those who desire access.

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