

For those who would be governor

To date, four serious Republicans have announced their intent to run for governor. One serious Democrat. Other candidates are yet possible. Primary election day is eight months away. So conventional wisdom says, wait a bit, the campaign season has barely begun.

But we are not into waiting. Now is the time to query and discern whether candidates are committed and responsive to public programs and the people who work therein.

So far as we are concerned, the campaign season is in full swing. MEA-MFT member/leaders are already out and about asking leading gubernatorial candidates what they want to do and how.

If we are not timely, smart, and persistent about asking our questions, demanding specific answers, and sharing those answers with our members and the public at large, our next governor could well be as devoid of enlightened leadership, inspired rhetoric, and common sense as the one we have now.

So, these are some of the questions we are and will be asking:

Do you support state employees?

As governor, how will you repair the damage done to state employees and the necessary and vital programs they provide the citizens of Montana? Are you as outraged as we are with a governor and legislature who would abuse state employees with a biennial pay increase of no more than two bits an hour come January 1, 2005?

Will you support *real* prebudget negotiations? Are you dedicated to market-based employee compensation? Will you oppose outsourcing and privatization? Are you prepared to put an end to vacancy savings?

What about public schools?

As governor, how will you work to adequately and equitably fund elementary and secondary schools? Are you into private school tuition tax credits or pay vouchers?

Will you seek to repeal local school district assumption of the retirement costs of federally assisted school employees? Are you prepared to

equalize upward elementary and high school ANB? Will you push legislation to create a new state funded entitlement to help local school districts fund fixed personnel costs?

Don't you think the basic entitlement could be restructured to embrace numbers of elementary and high school students? And what about school employee health care?

Higher education? Tax system?

As governor, how will you work to provide competitive salaries for our higher education faculty? And are you just about fed up with the decade-long, insidious, user-fee, privatization of our university system?

As governor, how will you work to restructure Montana's tax system, a system that is neither equitable nor sufficiently revenue producing to support state and local governments and schools?

Will you push to freeze the business equipment tax at 3 percent? Are you ready to cut back if not repeal the huge cuts in income and capital gains taxes the last legislature adopted?

Do you have any new revenue streams in mind? How will you address the deep budget deficit almost certain to bedevil the next legislature?

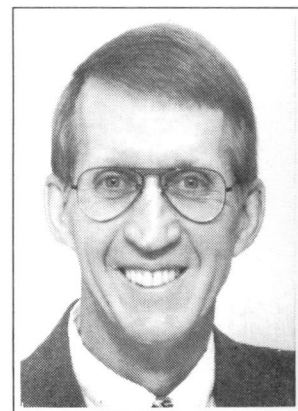
As governor, will you protect the right of public and private sector workers to organize and bargain collectively? Will you oppose so-called right to work and paycheck protection?

Contrary to rumor

Contrary to rumor or supposition or small talk or whatever you may hear or read out there, MEA-MFT COPE will do all we can to elect the gubernatorial candidate who best answers these and other questions and demonstrates he or she has the ability to deliver on those answers.

Candidates who duck and dodge and say, "I'll wait until I see the legislation" will **not** receive our support. Candidates who are unable or unwilling to speak up, to take risks on behalf of public programs, and to support the state, local, and education employees who deliver those programs, will **not** receive our support.

Join in. Ask your own questions. Stay tuned. ■



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