

ELECTION CONNECTION 2026

The Montana elections team met in Helena February 23 to 27, 2026. Our dedicated team of Clerk and Recorders, Election Administrators and other staff members across the state participated in the 2026 Election Summit put on by the Secretary of States office. Because of this training and certification, we are able service the voters of Montana and empower our communities with democratic values, trust, and integrity.

The 2026 Election season is upon us, with the Primary election set to take place on June 2, 2026. Prairie County will once again commit to publishing our Election Connection articles weekly to try and keep you informed and up to date on election processes, especially with changes that have occurred during the legislative session. There have been some changes that everyone needs to be aware of and dates to mark on your calendar for the 2026 Elections.

During the 2025 legislative session **HB 207** was passed creating code changes. The local candidate filing deadline dates for the primary election were all shortened, allowing for a two-week window for filing down from two months in previous years. Candidate filing for the primary closed at 5pm on March 4, 2026, as did the filing for a write-in and withdrawal of candidacy. If there is no declared write in by the deadline, voters will **no longer** see a write-in line on the ballot.

No sooner than 90 days prior to election

(MCA: 13-10-201(7), 13-1-403(1,2), 13-1-502 (1,2), 13-10-211(1), 13-10-325(1)(b))

The Commissioner of Political Practice in Montana is responsible for tracking campaign finance and reporting. It is required for candidates to file with the Commissioners of Political Practice (COPP) within 5 days of filing for office. 85 days (March 9, 2026) before primary election, the election administrator must declare the filled candidates to the COPP. The COPP then certifies if the candidate's name can appear on the ballot locally and statewide this certification must be done by March 12, 2026. The final step is done by March 16, 2026, when the election administrator certifies the local names and ballot issues and the Secretary of State (SOS) certifies the ballot names and designations of state and federal candidates to election administrators.

(MCA: 13-1-405, 13-37-201(2), 13-37-126(5), 13-10-208)

When an election office receives Declarations of Nominations equal to or less than the number of positions to be elected, the election administrator can determine the local primary election unnecessary and notify the local governing body in writing. This is the case in Prairie County. Notice given on March 11, 2026, with Resolution 26-21 following moving these candidates forward to the General Federal Election being held on November 3, 2026: *(MCA: 13-1-403(4))*

Sheriff/Coroner: Keifer Lewis (R)

County Attorney/Public Administrator: No Filing

Treasurer/Superintendent of Schools: Garrett Lapp (R)

Justice of Peace: Mary Bucher (Non-Partisan)

The only local county elected position that will appear on the ballot will be Prairie County Commissioner District 1 with the following Republican candidates: Russell Holt, Christine W. Keltner, and Harry McNall.

Election judges are an extremely vital part of the election process as they are responsible for running polling places and counting centers on Election Day. We continue to look for qualified members of the community that want to be involved and dedicate their time to being an election judge. To be an election judge, you must be 18 years of age, a registered voter and resident of the county where you serve and attend training conducted by the county election administrator. Our first training will take place on March 31, 2026, and will be at the Prairie County courthouse starting at 5:30 pm for new judges and our more seasoned judges will begin at 6:00pm where we will be doing more on hands mock election, along with a question and answer session. A citizen's right to cast their vote both privately, independently and having it count rests in the hands of each one of these election judges. If interested, please contact our office at (406) 635-5575. *All training is open to the public so please feel free to attend.*

Next week's election connection will continue to go through the changes we will see during the primary, dates to remember, and any other important information necessary to facilitate fair, transparent and secure elections. We will also keep updating the county's election website at <http://www.prairiecounty.org/election>.

Shari Robertson
Election Administrator