



HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK NEWS

VOLUME 21,

NUMBER 3,

OCTOBER 2011

ANALYZING THE RAVALLI CO. COMMISSION: AN EXAMPLE OF RIGHT-WING “GOVERNING”

The morning after November 2010’s General Election, Ravalli County citizens awoke to find that their county had taken a hard-right turn. Taking advantage of anti-Obama sentiment and local opposition to zoning and other planning issues were three newly-elected commissioners—Matt Kanenwisher, Suzy Foss, and Ron Stoltz—and the new county attorney, Bill Fulbright. During the campaign season, all of them had courted both far-right activists espousing classic anti-government tenets and deep-pocketed pro-development forces.

Back to the Future

To understand Ravalli County’s Election Day hangover, it’s necessary to examine both the General Election of 2008 and the organizations and individuals which gained momentum following it. In 2008, a well-organized effort by anti-zoning and pro-development forces successfully repealed the Ravalli County Growth Policy, which would have provided the basis for all county zoning regulations.

The repeal was funded and orchestrated, in part, by pro-development factions that stood to benefit financially from this setback to planning and zoning. However, this anti-regulation movement in Ravalli County also enlisted local anti-government and conspiracy aficionados who sought to promote their own ultra-libertarian version of property rights. In simple terms, it was developers teaming up with anti-government ideologues.

This poorly-defined coalition between traditional pro-development Republicans and adherents to more extreme groups, such as the Constitution Party of Montana and the John Birch Society, became strained after the 2010 election. Much to the dismay of some mainstream Republicans, the radical fringe began gaining power through what could be described as the emerging Tea Party narrative. This narrative combined numerous right-wing beliefs, everything from regressive tax and budget ideas to less restriction on private property to extreme notions of open rebellion against the government.

In Ravalli County, the ascendancy of far-right extremism took its most conspicuous form in the shape of Celebrating Conservatism, a group which now inactive. The organization was a coalition of far-right individuals and groups who sponsored well-attended monthly meetings at the Ravalli County Fairgrounds for most of its two-year existence (see the December 2009 and April 2010 editions of *Network News* for more). It featured anti-government speakers that included: failed Constitution Party presidential candidate Chuck Baldwin; anti-Semitic tax protestor

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*Human Rights
Network News is a
publication of the
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Photo from Ravalli Republic



Matt Kanenwisher, Suzy Foss, and Ron Stoltz are pictured (left to right) during their swearing ceremony as new Ravalli County Commissioners.

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Red Beckman; militia favorite Richard Mack; and Schaeffer Cox, who is currently standing trial in Alaska for plotting to kill criminal justice employees. Celebrating Conservatism paraded these types of speakers through the Bitterroot Valley as authorities on how communities should be run.

Celebrating Conservatism relied heavily on flawed interpretations of our country's founding documents as well as the Bible. Just one of many examples was its "2nd Amendment Declaration," circulated and published with about 700 signatures in the local newspaper in Spring 2010. This document declared that there was a "God-given right to self-defense" superior to "human legislation" that, if "infringed upon" would be grounds for "good and faithful people...to alter or abolish" the current federal government. Then-candidate Suzy Foss signed the declaration.

During Celebrating Conservatism's heyday leading up to the 2010 elections, the Republican candidates for county commissioner and county attorney openly courted the vote of those sympathetic to the group. They attended and staffed tables at the group's meetings and distributed campaign literature at its events.

While pro-development Republicans may have been concerned about the local right-wing's allusions to revolution, they were more concerned with getting rid of the current county commissioners. The incumbent commissioners had attempted to implement zoning, streamside setbacks, and a state-mandated update of the sub-

division-review process. To oust them, pro-development Republicans lined up behind the slate of GOP candidates for the commission, the same ones courting the Celebrating Conservatism crowd.

Suzy Foss, for example, was a well-known anti-federal government activist in Ravalli County before ever running for office. Just one case of her far-right views on public display was in Fall 2000. She and her husband, Lee, attempted to exploit emotions generated by the huge Bitterroot forest fires of that year. Along with local surveyor Terry Nelson of Applebury Survey, they founded a group called Voters Opportunity to Educate (VOTE). VOTE attempted to gain local support for getting rid of federal control of public lands by invoking the classic anti-government belief of county supremacy.

County supremacy advances the idea that the county commission should have absolute power over the land within its borders. This control would extend to public land under the federal government's jurisdiction and would allow the county to ignore federal and state law. It is embraced by both the anti-environmental "wise use" movement and the anti-government "patriot" movement.

Pushing a Right-Wing Agenda

Once in office, the new commissioners wasted no time letting citizens know how they intended to interpret their victory. After less than a month in office, Foss had organized a "training session" with a Texas-based "wise use" group—American Stewards of Liberty (ASL)—to teach attendees how local governments can claim equal status with the federal government. ASL is at the front of the movement pushing a pseudo-legal process they euphemistically call "coordination," which seems to be the latest name for county supremacy and nullification.

Foss' training session cost \$45 and was attended by a quorum of Ravalli County commissioners. Concerned community members attempted to get information through the Freedom of Information Act process about what the commissioners did at the training. County Attorney Fulbright said the FOIA request did not have to be honored, because the training was not public. However, commissioners had listed the training on their schedules as official business and a quorum of commissioners attended it. As of press time, the FOIA request remains on the table.

In April 2011, the commission signed a \$1,500 contract with ASL which committed the county to paying
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the group's lawyers \$150/hour to help the county nullify federal laws through "coordination." The contract was entered into despite the county already having four attorneys on its payroll. Although it's not clear at this point how they intend to accomplish "coordination" in an actual legal sense, it appears clear that the commissioners' first targets will be the Bitterroot National Forest's Travel Management Plan and the Endangered Species Act as it applies to wolves.

Also in April, the new commissioners bought a new American flag, even though they repeatedly say there is no money for anything but the basics of government. The commissioners found \$200 for a new "unfringed" flag. The initial flag they had featured gold fringe, which is an integral part of anti-government conspiracy theory. The theory states that any business done under the influence of a "fringed" flag is illegitimate because that type of flag signifies "Admiralty Law." This conspiracy theory has been a favorite of the anti-government crowd since the height of the 1990s' "patriot" movement.

The county commissioners also installed a new Planning Director, Terry Nelson. Nelson, current chair of the Ravalli County Republican Central Committee, was also president of the now-defunct VOTE group. He is a longstanding opponent of planning, zoning, and stream-side setbacks. With no education or training in planning, the commissioners installed Nelson because of his apparent experience with a newly-added section to the job description—"knowledge of government-to-government coordination." In his application for the post, Nelson noted he had attended two ASL "coordination" training sessions.

Could the Tide be Starting to Turn?

While the commissioners continue to push their ideological agenda, some of their support has started to crumble. Since the election last Fall, Celebrating Conservatism has been inactive and may be totally defunct. Its main activist, Mona Docteur, dropped completely out of her highly-visible activist role and removed almost all the bumper stickers from her car. At last report, she was selling Goji Berry juice as a weight-loss product with another former Celebrating Conservatism activist, Amanda Walker.

Walker and her husband's bookstore, Liber Books, opened its doors more or less simultaneously with Celebrating Conservatism's rise in local popularity. It offered up such far-right conspiracy authors as Cleon Skousen and other titles not previously found in local bookstores. It is now closed.

Probably the commissioner's biggest public-relations disaster to date was when they took aim at Ravalli County's Title X-funded family planning clinic. Budget cuts had already reduced the clinic's hours of operation from once a week to twice a month. The clinic provides a whole range of basic healthcare services. During the previous year, it served over 460 patients, of which 88% did not have health insurance and 73% were below the poverty line. The clinic plays an incredibly important role in the community.

The clinic also provides contraceptives, which was the anti-choice ideology referenced by the most extreme commissioners when they announced they were think-



The website for American Stewards of Liberty contains an entire section on its so-called "coordination" strategy.

ing of refusing \$39,000 in federal funding. However, at their meeting in early August where they were scheduled to make a final decision, they were met by over 100 angry and passionate citizens who demanded that the Title X funds be accepted. Under this pressure, Commissioner Foss changed her vote and the funds were accepted, but with a stipulation. The commissioners told clinic staff to explore other funding sources for next year.

Community members in Ravalli County can't say they weren't warned about the commissioners. However, in rapidly-growing numbers which includes many traditional Republicans, they are saying they are alarmed and concerned about the hard-right turn the 2010 election produced and the negative impact on the local democratic process. The latest example of this public pushback came during the ongoing fight over the budget adopted by the commissioners. Claiming a shortfall while refusing a FOIA request to provide a full accounting of the county's finances to the public, the commis-

(Ravalli, continued on page 11)

FORMER KKK ORGANIZER RUNS FOR US HOUSE

John Abarr, a former organizer for the Ku Klux Klan, is running as a Republican for Montana's open Congressional seat.

The press reported that Abarr is running on a platform that would legalize marijuana, increase funding for mental health programs, keep abortion legal, abolish the death penalty, and save "the White Race." Abarr believes that he will do well in the election based on what he perceives as a backlash against America's first African American president.

According to a June 2011 report issued by Public Policy Polling, while fellow Republican Steve Daines appears to be outpolling him, Abarr is ahead of the Democrats in the race. Public Policy Polling stated that its poll appeared to be "based on partisan cues," meaning that Abarr's "favorability" over Democratic candidates is likely because of the "R" he has behind his name.

Bowen Greenwood, the executive director of the Montana Republican Party, told the press that his party doesn't support Abarr, saying, "We have a nine-year record of not supporting anyone who is affiliated with the KKK." Greenwood appeared to be alluding to Abarr's run for the Montana Legislature as a Republican in 2002. Abarr failed to make it past the Primary Election, receiving only 114 votes.

Abarr has supported efforts by other Klansmen running for public office. In the early 1990s, he contributed to the political campaign of David Duke.

Duke helped create a template for white supremacists running for office. A national Klan leader, Duke stashed away his Klan robe, bought a business suit, and began calling



John Abarr

himself a conservative Republican. Duke was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives in 1989 and lost a close Louisiana gubernatorial race in 1991. Duke demonstrated how white supremacists could reposition themselves by using coded language instead of racial epithets.

Abarr seems to be hopeful of pulling a David Duke. Back in 2002, he told the press that he wasn't involved in the Klan anymore because he had decided it wasn't very effective. However, in 2004, the Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan listed a chapter in Great Falls, and the Network came across information implicating Abarr as the local contact.

Abarr has a history of aligning himself with the Republican Party. In 1994, he participated in MSU-Billings' Young Republicans, and the group supported Billings-area anti-Semite Red Beckman. When the Montana GOP discovered Abarr was involved, it refused to recognize the Young Republicans campus group.

Abarr also worked phone-banking for Conrad Burns' US Senate re-

election campaign in 1994.

Also in 1994, he served as the campaign manager for Rudy Stanko's unsuccessful bid for Justice of the Peace in Department 1 of Yellowstone County. Stanko was an adherent to the World Church of the Creator, now known as The Creativity Movement, which refers to people of color as "mud races" and "jungle dwelling cannibals."

Prior to moving to Montana, Abarr ran the Realm of Wyoming and worked to help William Daniel Johnson, a Wyoming congressional candidate who wrote the Pace Amendment to the US Constitution. It would have only allowed citizenship to people of European (white) descent, and anyone not fitting that criteria would have been deported.

In 2002, Abarr said he still agreed with Johnson on the Pace Amendment, although he didn't think it would work now because there would be too many people to deport.

Over the years, Abarr has recruited for the Klan in Montana under group names like Realm of Montana and Montana Quest. He has distributed literature from the Arkansas-based Knights of the KKK, in addition to anti-gay fliers that attacked Montanans. While Abarr says no longer organizes for the KKK, he admits to still being on its mailing list.

On the campaign trail again, Abarr has stated, "I think that the fact Obama got elected shows that the white people are starting to lose their political power," and "I am running to draw attention to the fact that white people are becoming a minority and losing our political power and way of life." □

MONTANA LEGISLATURE FAILS TO ACT ON HEALTHCARE REFORM: TEA-PARTY MAJORITY REJECTS “STATE’S RIGHTS,” FAVORS FEDERAL INTERVENTION

The 2011 Montana Legislature didn’t accomplish much in terms of expanding access to healthcare for Montanans or setting up the necessary statutes and structures to implement federal healthcare reform. While the Network has been critical of the shortcomings of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Affordable Care Act), we certainly recognize that it included a number of important reforms.

The Network believes that the insurance model is fundamentally flawed and cannot deliver universal and equitable healthcare to all Montanans. The Network also believes that healthcare is a human right and should not be treated as a commodity that people with resources can access and people without resources cannot. The truth is that we are currently living in the insurance model. We need to make that model work for as many people as possible until we fundamentally change the way we finance and deliver healthcare in this state and in this country.

The Affordable Care Act included a number of regulatory reforms which were meant to make insurance companies more transparent and accountable to the public. One of these measures was particularly important to the Network, and something that we have been working to advance at the state level for a few years. The policy is Rate Review Authority, and Montana is one of the only states in the country that does not have the power to review insurance policy increases, assess whether increases are justified, and communicate that assessment to policy holders and to the public.

The Affordable Care Act required that the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the states, establish a process to review unreasonable increases in premiums for health insurance. Rate Review Authority is incredibly important in making sure that people purchasing health insurance have the information they need when deciding to renew a policy or when purchasing a policy for the first time. In Montana, Rate Review Authority would give the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance, Monica Lindeen, the ability to review and assess the reasonableness of premium increases that insurance companies make on policies being sold to Montanans.

During the 2011 Montana Legislative Session, the House Business and Labor Committee heard a bill to give Lindeen this authority. Rep. Robyn Driscoll (D-

Billings) sponsored House Bill 105, which was a straightforward piece of legislation that required health insurance issuers to file their rates and justifications for rate increases with the Commissioner. It set up a framework for the Commissioner to analyze the rates and either approve or disapprove them. Finally, it set up a “minimum loss ratio (MLR),” which is a policy that ensures a certain percentage of the premium paid goes toward paying for actual medical care.

The Network has long supported MLR policies as a way to promote human rights values. MLR ensures that paying for actual medical care is rewarded, while using premium dollars to pay for administrative costs and padding company profits is not. HB 105 set the MLR at 85% for large group markets. If an insurer’s policy in this group didn’t meet this minimum loss ratio, an across the board refund of the difference would be paid out to all policy holders.

HB 105 complied with the minimum standards laid out in the Affordable Care Act, and it represented good public policy that promoted transparency, public accountability, and efficiency in the private health insurance market. While the bill had its hearing in the House Business Labor and Committee in mid-January, the GOP-dominated committee waited for a month before finally taking a vote to table HB 105. The bill then officially died in process when it missed the transmittal deadline for revenue bills at the end of March.

War on Affordable Care

Instead of giving the Commissioner the tools needed under the Affordable Care Act, the Republican majority spent its time trying to delay or prohibit implementation of national reform. In so doing, the Tea-Party majority of the GOP Caucus actively worked against the local control and “state’s rights” opportunities found in the Affordable Care Act. They set up a situation where, instead of Montana setting up its own structures, the federal government will now come in and do it.

The GOP’s overall strategy was reflected in its platform, which states: “We support the repeal of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare.” This obstructionist attitude carried over to numerous parts of the Affordable Care Act,

(Healthcare, continued on page 7)

HOLOCAUST DENIER SPEAKS IN KALISPELL AND BILLINGS

An internationally-known Holocaust denier, David Irving, came to Montana in early May to speak about a prominent member of Adolph Hitler's Third Reich. Irving presented in both Kalispell and Billings.

David Irving bills himself as 73-year-old British writer who has authored 30 books on the military history of World War II and Nazi Germany.

and a key architect of the Holocaust. Irving's tour included stops in Portland, Seattle, Spokane, Kalispell, Billings, Bismarck, and Fargo.

A Disgraced Historian

David Irving has been described as the most skillful preacher of Holocaust denial in the world today. His reputation as a historian was widely

1963, and it was about the Allied bombing of Dresden during World War II. The book was successful, but Irving's works began to include revisionist history.

He began writing biographies, and many aging former mid-ranking and high-ranking Nazis donated diaries and other material in hopes of a favorable story. Irving has described his work as the act of "stone-clean-



April Gaede (left) organized David Irving's event in Kalispell, while Allen Goff (right) and his fellow members of The Creativity Movement may have been why Irving spoke in Billings.

However, his reputation as a historian has been discredited because of his sympathy for the Third Reich and anti-Semitism. A 1996 court case found that he has "for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence."

Irving was on a spring tour across the West giving presentations titled, "The Life and Death of Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's Lieutenant. 44 years in 44 minutes." Himmler was a leader of Hitler's SS

discredited after he unsuccessfully brought a libel suit against American historian Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books in 1996.

In her book, Lipstadt had called Irving a Holocaust denier, falsifier, and bigot, and said that he manipulated and distorted real documents. The court found that Irving was an active Holocaust denier, anti-Semite, and racist, who "associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism."

Irving wrote his first book in

ing" Hitler, during which he clears off the "slime" that he feels had been unjustly applied to Hitler's reputation.

Until the mid-1980s, Irving moved between being a serious author and an anti-Semitic Holocaust denier. However, his continued praise of Hitler's Third Reich and his anti-Semitic remarks began to damage his reputation.

In a 1983 speech, he proclaimed Hitler to be the "biggest friend the Jews had in the Third Reich." In a
(*Irving, cont. on page 9*)

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including Rate Review, MLR, and the creation of a state-based insurance exchange.

GOP lawmakers from both chambers supported numerous proposals attacking the Affordable Care Act. Some of them were killed at the committee level, while others only failed to become law because of gubernatorial vetoes. The various GOP proposals included:

◆ Senate Bill 106 – Sen. Jason Priest (R-Red Lodge): Compel the Montana Attorney General to join the Florida lawsuit against the Affordable Care Act. The bill passed both chambers of the legislature before being vetoed by Gov. Brian Schweitzer.

◆ Senate Bill 161 - Sen. Verdell Jackson (R-Kalispell): Declare the Affordable Care Act null and void; make it a felony for any public employee to work on implementing the Act. The Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee tabled the bill.

◆ Senate Bill 228 – Sen. Jason Priest (R-Red Lodge): Prohibit the creation of the state-based insurance exchange under the Affordable Care Act. The bill passed both chambers before being vetoed by Gov. Brian Schweitzer.

◆ House Bill 206 – Rep. Gary MacLaren (R-Victor): A constitutional amendment that attempted to strike down the Affordable Care Act’s mandate to buy health insurance. The measure did not receive enough votes to be referred to the Montana ballot.

◆ House Bill 284 – Rep. Tom Burnett (R-Bozeman): Prohibit state employees from working to implement the Affordable Care Act. The House Human Services Committee tabled the bill.

Where the Legislature Left Us

The failure to create the laws necessary for the state to hold insurance companies accountable to Montanans is incredibly disappointing. Because of this failure, it appears that the federal government will step in and play the role that Montana’s Insurance Commissioner would

have if the legislature had granted proper authority.

On July 1, Commissioner Lindeen was informed that, after the Center for Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight reviewed Montana’s laws and regulations, it determined that the state does not meet the criteria for an Effective Rate Review Program. Beginning September 1, 2011, the federal government will review rate increases in the state.

Similarly, the federal government will be setting up the online-based health insurance exchange required by the Affordable Act. In late August, the regional director for the US Health and Human Services Department told an interim legislative committee that the State of Montana will be able to take over operation of the exchange once the federal government gets it up and running.

Sen. Joe Balyeat (R-Bozeman) responded that the legislature acted appropriately in rejecting all attempts to create the state-level exchange. He said the state won’t have to develop its own system and can just take over the one developed by the federal government. “To me, that’s just more efficient,” Balyeat told the media.

However, Rep. Chuck Hunter (D-Helena), who sponsored one of the failed bills to create the exchange, said it made more sense for the state to take the initiative and ensure it could design its own exchange. He stated there was no indication during the legislative session that the partnership model would be available. “From what I heard today,” he told the media, “those things are still very much up in the air right now. We don’t know what the partnership model will even look like.”

The Network will continue monitoring the developments and looking for opportunities to make health insurance translate into actual healthcare for Montanans. Within the current insurance model, that usually means working for effective regulation that moves private insurance closer to meeting human rights principles. Rate Review Authority at the state level is something that we should continue to work toward.

We are disappointed that the 2011 Montana Legislature seemed to put politics ahead of policy, ignored the thousands of Montanans who would benefit from implementing the state portions of the Affordable Care Act, and refused to pass reasonable policies. However, there may be opportunities down the road for Montana to innovate and create its own state health plan. While that doesn’t help people that need access to healthcare now, it is something that the Network will continue to investigate and work toward. □

LEGISLATIVE WIN LEADS INTO HELENA ORDINANCE CAMPAIGN

The April 2010 passage of the Missoula Anti-Discrimination Ordinance was a major milestone for Montana (for more, see the August 2010 edition of *Network News*). The lesbian, gay, bi, and trans (LGBT) community, and its allies, weren't the only ones to recognize this. Opponents of LGBT equality also noticed.

During the 2011 Montana Legislature, the Network's members and supporters, as well as great ally organizations, had to spend considerable time, energy, and resources defeating a well-orchestrated attempt to repeal Missoula's policy and prohibit any other locality from passing a similar measure.

House Bill 516 (Rep. Kristen Hansen, R-Havre) advanced through the legislative process for months. It had a couple of raucous and emotional hearings and passed the House. It eventually died in the Senate Local Government Committee.

During the bill's hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, some supporters went way beyond the sponsor's argument that Missoula had overstepped its authority and, instead, invoked biblical law. The Bitterroot Valley's Rev. Harris Himes told the committee:

"The religious reason [to discriminate against the LGBT community] is God himself, who says that homosexuality is an abomination, and he has punishments for that ... The punishment is this. If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.

They shall surely be put to death."

Rep. Ken Peterson (R-Billings), chair of the House Judiciary Committee, severely limited the amount of time for testimony during the hearing on HB 516. Because so many opponents to the bill had traveled from outside Helena to speak against it, the Network organized a "people's hearing." It took place near the statue of Jeannette Rankin in the state Capitol, and people were able to read their testimony into a microphone to the crowd that gathered.

While the bill passed the Republican-dominated House by a 62-37 vote, it faced a tougher road in the Senate. An initial vote by the Senate Local Government Committee passed it onto the Senate floor.

However, Sen. Jon Sonju (R-Kalispell), chair of the Local Government Committee, said he had talked to Missoula public officials about the ordinance. After those discussions, he said he didn't think HB 516 was needed. The Senate as a whole overwhelmingly voted to send the bill back to the committee. While Rep. Hansen talked about trying to blast the bill out of committee, HB 516 wasn't seen again.

HB 516's appearance wasn't totally surprising. Progress often comes with significant pushback. It was, however, hard work to stop this piece of legislation from becoming law in what was a terribly-regressive legislative session. The work paid off, and the Network considers defeating HB 516 a major victory that allows us to continue our strategy of winning anti-discrimination protection for Montanans city by city!

Helena Ordinance Campaign

The Network is excited to announce that this Fall we'll be beginning an anti-discrimination ordinance campaign in Montana's capital (and the city we're based out of), Helena. We've been gearing up for this campaign since the legislative session ended. We know that the Helena community is ready to support the effort, and we'll definitely need energy and support for this campaign.

Like the ordinance in Missoula, we will support a measure to protect the LGBT community from discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, and public accommodations. We hope that our campaign will show the Helena City Commission that there is incredible support for this policy within the community. Local community members, in addition to Network staff, have already been meeting with city commissioners and the mayor about such an ordinance. Early indications show support for passing an anti-discrimination ordinance.

We know there is broad and diverse support for fairness and dignity for Helena's LGBT community, and we want the campaign to reflect that diversity. We are looking forward to gathering thousands of signatures from Helenans who support putting our values into law. We know that business owners and members of the faith community will step up and take leadership roles in this effort.

And like with every campaign, we'll need your help to make this policy a reality. We'll need a strong base of volunteers in Helena to talk to their families, friends, and neighbors
(*Helena, cont. on page 9*)

(Irving, from page 6)

1986 speech in Australia, he argued that photographs of both survivors and victims of the Holocaust taken by Allied soldiers in the spring of 1945 proved that the Allies were responsible for the Holocaust, not the Germans.

At a speech in Munich, Germany, in 1990, Irving claimed there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. As a result, he was convicted of Holocaust denial in Germany in 1991. Irving has since been banned from visiting Germany. In 2005, he was arrested in Austria, where Holocaust denial is a crime, because of a 1989 presentation in which he said there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Visiting Montana's Hot Spots

Irving's stops in Montana were in two communities where white supremacist activity has increased over the past few years. In Billings, The Montana Creativity Movement's Allen Goff has been a ringleader of this activism, and he has consistently been in trouble with the law.

In May 2010, Goff was acquitted of felony weapons charges for shooting a Hispanic teenager. Evidence of Goff's white supremacist activities was withheld from the jury on the judge's orders, and Goff claimed the shooting was in self-defense. While he avoided the felony conviction, he did plead guilty to a misdemeanor weapons charge.

Just a few months later, Goff violated parole by shoplifting a baseball cap from a store. In November 2010, he was again arrested, this time for felony assault with a weapon for pointing a gun at and threatening to kill an American Indian in a store parking lot. In late July, Goff pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor count of obstruction and was sentenced to 40 days in jail. The felony assault charge was resolved through a deferred prosecution agreement. Goff cannot violate any state,

federal or local laws for three years, and he is prohibited from possessing firearms.

"We cannot say for sure that David Irving came to Billings because of Allen Goff and the Montana Creativity Movement's activities," said the Network's Travis McAdam. "However, we think it's more than just a coincidence that Irving picked Billings, which is one of the places that has seen an explosion in white supremacist organizing over the past few years."

The connection in Kalispell was easier to document. In the Flathead area, nationally-known white supremacist April Gaede has participated in a variety of public white supremacist events in the area (see the August 2010 edition of *Network News* for more). She has also supported the creation of an Aryan Homeland in the Flathead Valley that is called Kalispell Pioneer Little Europe (see the December 2010 edition of *Network News* for more). Gaede took credit for organizing Irving's stop in Kalispell and bragged online that she had dinner with him.

The Southern Poverty Law Center reported on its blog the location of Irving's presentation in Kalispell the day of the event. The event took place at the Museum at Central School, and the staff said they couldn't refuse the space based on "ideological content" because the venue is "publicly owned." Following Irving's speech, museum staff reported that nine Irving supporters attended, in addition to a handful of people who disagreed.

Irving is part of a radical right-wing faction that works to rewrite history and spread a hateful message in communities around the world. His visit to Montana only further perpetuates the efforts of local white supremacists. Especially in the Flathead Valley, the pro-Nazi and pro-Hitler films shown by local white supremacists are presented as educational events to create dialogue about history. In reality, the films and Irving are tools used by anti-Semites and white supremacists to try and make their beliefs appear less offensive and more academic. □

(Helena, from page 8)

bors about why an anti-discrimination ordinance is the right thing to do. We'll need strong allies from Helena and other communities to talk to elected officials and continue to help frame this issue in terms of our shared values. As we saw in Missoula, when one community makes a decision to protect its residents, other communities take notice.

The energy and commitment that defeated Rep. Hansen's HB 516 will be on display again in Helena this Fall as we pursue Montana's second local anti-discrimination ordinance. We hope that, no matter where you live, you'll lend us your support. If you'd like to volunteer on the campaign, or you would just like more information, please contact Jamee Greer at 406-442-5506 ext. 12 or jamee@mhrn.org. □

(Burgert, from page 12)

woods, and set up elaborate booby traps with trip wires which set off a shotgun when activated.

After receiving a tip that Burgert was hiding at a house with a massive stockpile of weapons, officials staked out the location. They observed Burgert and a woman leaving the house. Authorities obtained a search warrant for the property and discovered a vast cache of weapons and ammunition. When Burgert and the woman returned, officials took her into custody and Burgert fled into the woods west of Kalispell.

Burgert led a SWAT team on an all-night chase resulting in a standoff with Burgert holding an assault rifle to his own head for six hours before surrendering.

Once Burgert was taken into custody, a follow-up investigation uncovered a militia cell called "Project 7." The militia group, led by Burgert, had been stockpiling weapons, explosives, and 25,000 rounds of ammunition. Investigators also found what they called hit lists containing personal information about several local officials.

It was revealed that Project 7 planned to assassinate several local officials and overthrow the government. The indictment quoted the wife of one of Project 7's members saying she attended a meeting where Burgert said of local police, "Kill them all. Kill them all, even their wives and children." The indictment also stated that between March 2001 and May 2003, Project 7 met in the Whitefish area to train in the use of illegal weapons.

Burgert wound up serving eight years in federal prison for several crimes, such as federal weapons

charges, assaulting and obstructing a police officer, and jumping bail. He was not charged regarding an assassination plot. Several other members of Project 7 pleaded guilty and served lesser charges than Burgert.

While in prison, Burgert was diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder with psychotic features and paranoid personality disorder. During his time in prison, his public defender argued for Burgert's 10-year sentence to be reduced, stating that "protection of the public

has been accomplished by providing Mr. Burgert with the medications and psychological services he required to address the mental health problems that contributed to his criminal conduct."

Another Man Hunt

Completing his eight years in federal prison in March 2010, Burgert was placed under federal and state probation for a total of three years. One of the conditions of his release was that he could not possess firearms, contact former militia members, or enter Flathead County.

Officials believe that Burgert is armed and dangerous and are concerned that he may return to the Flathead to target people he disliked from his past. Burgert has allegedly stolen three rifles from a former employer in eastern Montana, only two of

which have been recovered.

Shortly after Burgert's most recent escapade, Flathead County Undersheriff Jordan White made a statement to the press that Burgert had been in contact with Flathead Liberty Bell, an anti-government "patriot" group in the Flathead area, since his release from prison in 2010. However, White later retracted the statement.

Burgert continues to elude authorities. At its height,

(Burgert, continued on page 11)



Former Flathead County Sheriff Jim Dupont is pictured with some of the weapons found during the Project 7 investigation.

Photo from the Daily Inletlake

(Burgert, from page 10)

the manhunt featured personnel from the offices of the Missoula Police, Missoula County Sheriff, Flathead County Sheriff, FBI, US Marshals, ATF, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, US Forest Service, BLM, and the Montana National Guard, in addition to sophisticated aircraft and even cadaver dogs. By mid-July, the trail had gone cold. Authorities announced they were no longer actively pursuing Burgert.

Law enforcement is now hoping that a tip or lead comes up that will lead them to Burgert. Missoula County Undersheriff Michael Dominick told the press that they have no information to indicate that he is still in the mountain west of Lolo, MT. "He's going to surface somewhere," Undersheriff Dominick told *The Missoulian*. "We're not going to forget this."

Burgert is currently not only being sought for the probation violations which partially sparked the manhunt, but for attempted homicide after shooting at Missoula County Sheriff's deputies. □

(Ravalli, from page 3)

sioners eliminated 22 county positions. This led to community members protesting outside the county courthouse.

Over the years, the Network has witnessed what happens when right-wing conservatives get elected to office.

"They have no interest in governing, transparency or being accountable to the people," says the Network's Travis McAdam. "They have only one interest—dismantling and destroying institutions they perceive as the enemy— and they will manipulate and abuse the process to do it. That seems to be what's happening in Ravalli County."

Concerned community members are educating their neighbors about the commissioners' actions. A group called Ravalli County Watchdog maintains a website (www.rcwatchdog.org) with information on many of the developments discussed in this article and more. □

CORRECTION: In the January 2011 edition of *Network News*, we erroneously reported that Big Timber City Councilor Justin Ferguson was appointed to the council. He was elected to the council.

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FORMER “PROJECT 7” LEADER ON THE RUN...AGAIN

On June 12, David Burgert, an ex-militia leader in the Flathead, started a manhunt after he opened fire on Missoula County Sheriff’s deputies and then headed into the woods near Lolo.

Prior to the shooting, Burgert was reported to be living at several campgrounds and picnic areas near Lolo. A vehicle was reported to be parked at the Fort Fizzle day-use area for quite a while. When deputies went to check it out, Burgert fled and a low-speed car chase into the mountains ensued.

It appears to authorities that Burgert prepared for the shootout by leaving several caches of food in the area and packing ammunition into at least two different vehicles.

A week earlier, the Montana Highway Patrol stopped Burgert for a moving violation, at which point he reportedly told the officer that “he wasn’t going to be taken down like last time” and that “it would take a SWAT team.” In fact, Burgert’s current scheme leading authorities on a chase through the woods and stashing food supplies and weapons is similar to the “last time.”



Photo from the Missoulian

Dave Burgert

Burgert’s Shady Past

Burgert has a long history of butting heads with the law. He was convicted of burglary in Colorado and Alabama. Throughout the 1990s, he had several minor charges and arrests related to conducting guides in the forest without a permit.

In 2001, he and his buddy, Bob Cesnik, were arrested for assaulting a police officer after Cesnik refused to pull over for a highway patrolman and led police on a chase that ended at Burgert’s house. An altercation

ensued, and both Burgert and Cesnik were arrested. The charges against the two men were broadcast around militia circles, and the Militia of Montana (MOM) issued an e-mail calling all “patriots” in the area to come to Burgert and Cesnik’s first hearing to provide a “physical presence.”

Then in 2001, while the assault case was still pending, Burgert was charged with obstructing an officer. Responding to a call that a man was being stalked by four men, police found Burgert who claimed he was trying to serve papers for a lawsuit.

After being arrested, Burgert was put on house arrest, and his stories of alleged mistreatment by the police began spreading around militia circles.

In 2002, the supervisor of Burgert’s house arrest asked that he be jailed for not following the house arrest rules. At that point, Burgert jumped bail and left a note for his wife that he’d gone fishing. Burgert never came home, and his actions resulted in a manhunt.

Over the next month, Burgert faked his own death, camped in the
(*Burgert, cont. on page 10*)

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