

December 15, 2015

Hon. Al Jaeger, ND & Hon. Steve Simon, MN
Co-Chairs, NASS Standing Committee on Awards

National Association of Secretaries of State
444 North Capitol St. NW, Suite 401
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Co-Chairs Jaeger and Simon,

I've always had a deep passion for education, and like many of you, some of the best parts of the job are visiting classrooms and hosting students in our Capitol building. There is something so fulfilling about the energy and promise of a child. Our education system is a great one, but I have a deep belief that we as chief election officials have the responsibility and honor of not only conducting fair and transparent elections, but building a culture of voter engagement and education.

I am pleased to nominate our **Montana Civic Engagement Website and Outreach Program** for the NASS IDEAS Award. Civic engagement, after all, is a core pillar of our mission and our **Voter Participation Committee**. By educating children we are ensuring systemic change that will inspire future generations to become engaged in our democracy.

This project is the culmination of many years in education, my time in the legislature, serving as the Superintendent of Public Instruction and most recently as the Montana Secretary of State. As you know, I will be retiring from office at the conclusion of this term, and as I look back at my 20-plus years as a public official, I can truly say this project is one of which I am most proud.

The lead for this project was communications director Blair Fjeseth. Our team included web developer Stevey Still, elections deputy Lisa Kimmet and director of outreach Katrina Schweitzer. The collaboration ensured successful implementation and established goals to make sure the program continues to thrive.

Our Montana Civic Engagement Program is a strategic effort to engage students, parents and teachers by encouraging an open dialogue about the election process, an essential component to creating civic leadership and participation.

It consists of a mobile-friendly website that features games, mock ballots, interactive lessons, lesson plans, quizzes, Montana civic leader profiles and more. This site, combined with our civics road map, which is being sent to all Montana third- to eighth-grade classrooms, 18-and-ready-to-vote mailings, classroom visits, contests, conferences and emails, is an effort to leave a lasting legacy long after I depart from office.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have about this nomination. I can be reached by e-mail at LMcCulloch@mt.gov or by phone at (406) 444-4195.

I have attached a summary of the project and would encourage you to visit sos.mt.gov/civics for a hands-on look into our submission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warm regards,

Linda McCulloch
Montana Secretary of State



Executive Summary



History and Significance

We live in a world where we are constantly confronted with events that affect our communities. The pressure to change the world can often seem impossible or even paralyzing. By teaching children how to think with a civic mindset, we are showing them that taking initiative when confronted with adversity and making a difference — even just a small one — can lead to better communities. Also, by taking part in our government, we help determine its outcome.

Our program aims to teach students that the world's problems are our problems. The goal of an increased focus on civic education is to teach children and young adults how to confidently answer the question: "What am I doing for others?" If we want a future of active voters, community participants and concerned citizens, we must set the example and teach critical-thinking skills to future generations.

The primary aim of this program is to give educators even more resources to teach students these skills, and to inspire them to take action in their own communities.

This project has been on my mind for quite some time. As a teacher, I witnessed firsthand the need for increased civic engagement education, a better source for learning materials and a collaborative community to share ideas and lesson plans.

Last year, this project transformed from dream to reality. It is still growing and changing with the needs of our environment. We are working to obtain grant funding to build a stand-alone application that teachers can integrate into classroom tablets and iPads.

This project is a prime example of how government entities should collaborate. Internally, division leaders worked together to build and develop website content. Others, including the Governors Office and Office of Public Instruction, were consulted about content, ideal practices and the dissemination of information.

Our project was built in-house at no cost to the office. By working with other agencies and groups — including the Montana Teachers Association, the press, Office of Public Instruction and the Montana Librarians Association — we were able to effectively reach teachers and librarians across the state.

The team integrates new materials on a monthly basis to continue to engage parents, teachers and students.

Impacts/Results

Although there isn't a concrete way to accurately measure the impacts or success of this project, I can say that in a little more than a year we have had a tremendous amount of website traffic, emails, re-pins and downloads. Most important, we have had students interacting on the games, quizzes and build-a-seal pages.

Classrooms have participated in our state symbols contest, and we've visited with students across the state about their ability to impact the world around them by living a civically engaged life.

If one more child volunteers, isn't that a huge impact? If one more student registers to vote because of a lesson plan their teacher introduced, isn't that an achieved goal?

I hope that five, ten, fifteen years from now, a young woman will run for office and say, "I became interested in politics when Secretary McCulloch visited my classroom and told me that I was the key to change, that I was more than good enough to be an elected official, that I could make a difference in my community." The impact of this project will be seen in the impacts these students make on the world.



Supporting Materials



The following are examples of our Civic Engagement Website and Outreach Program. The program is constantly evolving to incorporate the ever-growing needs of our teachers, the issues our children are facing and new civic leader profiles. This program is intended to create an open dialogue between teachers, parents and their students.

- **Civics Interactive Website**

The website, sos.mt.gov/civics, features mock ballots, interactive lessons, lesson plans, quizzes, Montana civic leader profiles, build a seal and much more. The website teaches children about the election process, voting, jury duty, civic leadership and Montana history.

- **Contests**

Hosting contests is a surefire way to bring civics into the classroom. We recently asked teachers to talk with students about Montana state symbols. Several of our symbols were born out of civic activism. From our state flower being an experiment on teaching women how to organize, to our state soil, originally a civic lesson on how a bill becomes a law. We had submissions from across the state, which are hanging proudly in the Capitol.



Students posters on display in the Capitol

- **18 and Ready to Vote (see appendix A to view mailer)**

We send out an average of 1,100 “18 and Ready” to Vote mailers per month to Montana residents on their 18th birthday. The mailing talks about election facts, how to register and why voting is an important civic responsibility. Our website also has a section geared toward 18-year-olds with this same information. During high school classroom visits, we distribute this mailer to school librarians and AP history teachers.

- **Classroom Visits and Office Visits**

Websites are great, but it's also important to converse with students directly about their rights and responsibilities. Classroom visits range from AP history classes to elementary school classrooms. We also meet with legislative pages on a weekly basis and invite all students to an open office visit.

- **Teacher Outreach**

Conferences — While attending our yearly teachers’ summit we were able to talk with educators one-on-one about civics in the classroom. We were also able to hand out packets that included lesson plans, coloring sheets, facts and games.

Email — By partnering with other organizations we were able to access educator email lists. Using these partnerships, we have ensured that information is being disseminated statewide.



7th grade visitors!

- **Handouts for Students, Teachers and Parents (see appendix A for pictures of handouts)**

We provide various handouts for students, teachers and parents via the website, in our office and during classroom visits.



Appendix A: Supporting Materials



Civic Engagement Website



Mock Ballot

Do you think the holiday break should be longer or shorter?

- ☐ Longer
- ☐ I like it just the way it is
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Shorter

[Vote](#)

[View Results](#)

quick facts

Montana is the 41st state in the union.



Montana has a population of just over one million residents.



The largest city in Montana is Billings (108,869), & the smallest city is Ismay (19). (US Census 2010)



Welcome to my Civics Website!

I'm so pleased to be able to join you in learning about your civic rights and responsibilities as a Montanan and as a U.S. Citizen.

[About Linda »](#)

[Ask Linda »](#)



Appendix A: Supporting Materials



18 and Ready to Vote Mailer

Did you know...

72%

of Montana voters voted in the last Presidential election

17%

of Montana's voting population is 18-29 years old

Voting is easy!

Find your polling place (use the app below!)

- Most polling places are open from 7 am until 8 pm on election day.

Get your ballot in the mail

- Simply request to be placed on the absentee list.
- Receive your ballot in the mail, fill it out, and send it in or drop it off at your county election office.
- Ballots must be received by 8 pm on Election day. Postmarks are not accepted.

My Voter Page
<https://app.mt.gov/voterinfo/>

Find your polling place

View a sample ballot

Track your absentee ballot

Download on the App Store | Get it on Google play

What can YOU DO to make a difference?

VOTE to influence who your local and state election officials are

VOTE to have a say in who governs the United States

VOTE to help determine decisions on local roads, schools, libraries, parks and more

VOTE to make sure YOUR voice is heard!

In the **1960s** students just like you fought to pass the 26th Amendment, giving 18-year-olds the right to vote!

Don't forget to bring ID!

When voting at the polls, a current photo ID showing your name, or a utility bill or bank statement, or government document showing your current name and current address must be presented.

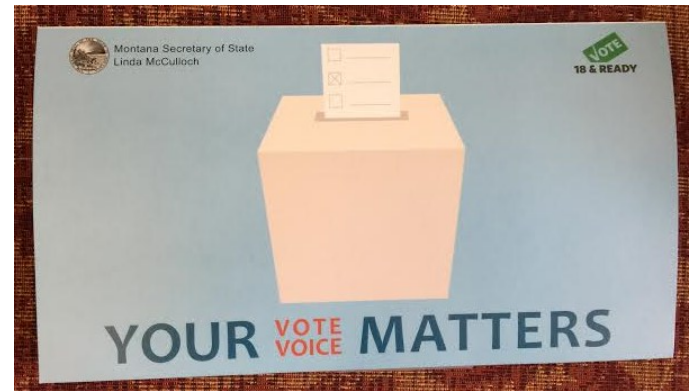
Show it off!
Download the digital I Voted sticker
<http://sos.mt.gov/media/>

JUNE 7TH
Primary Election

NOV 8TH
General Election

@SOSMcCulloch | 888-884-VOTE (8683) | soscivics@mt.gov

www.sos.mt.gov | www.sos.mt.gov/civics



Congratulations on turning 18! You are now an adult by law, which means you've gained new rights and responsibilities - **including the Right to Vote.**

Voting is one of the most fundamental rights we share as American citizens. It is at the core of our democracy and it is a privilege to be taken seriously.



Registering to vote in Montana is easy. In fact, it takes just a few minutes to fill out and mail in your registration card. If you have already registered, Montana thanks you for taking part in leading our state forward. If you have not registered to vote, I have included a voter registration card with this letter.

As a Montanan, your voice is powerful and important. I encourage you to take the time to be an active and informed voter so that your vote can make a positive difference on Election Day.

Montana is counting on you!

Best Regards,

Linda McCulloch

Linda McCulloch
Montana Secretary of State

Appendix A: Supporting Materials



Classroom and Capitol Visits



Swearing-in youth
election judges for
2014 statewide
Mock Election



Registering a
Montana
resident to
vote (on his
18th birth-
day!)



Classroom Visits



Students from near and far visiting the Capitol!

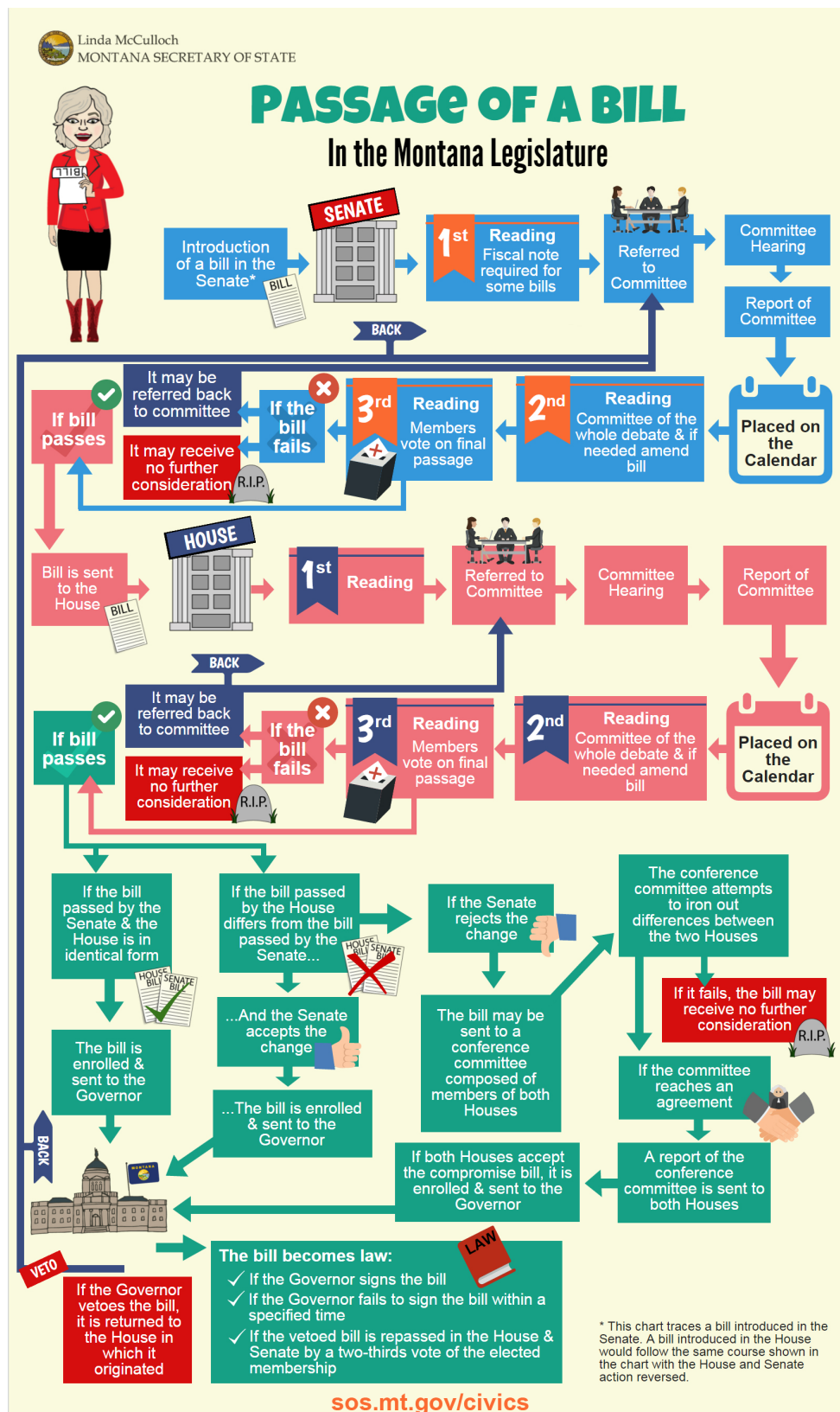
Appendix A: Supporting Materials



Handouts for Teachers, Parents and Students



 Linda McCulloch
MONTANA SECRETARY OF STATE



Appendix A: Supporting Materials



Pinterest Page for Teachers and Parents



Follow



SOS Civics

Montana · sos.mt.gov/civics

Secretary of State. Elementary School Librarian. Teacher.
Legislator. Superintendent of Public Instruction. Civics Leader.

7
Boards

80
Pins

0
Likes

5
Followers

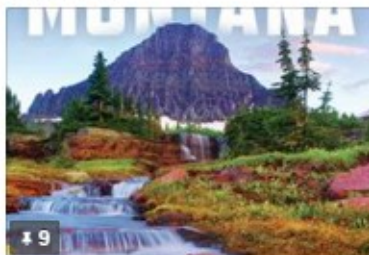
7
Following

Civic Lesson Plan Ideas



Follow

Montana



Follow

Civic Leaders



Follow

Words of Inspiration



Follow

Engage



Follow

All Things Civics



Follow