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2026: Montana General Election Outcomes

To: Interested clients
From: Basin Strategies Group
Date: November 4, 2026
Re: 2026 Montana general election analysis, next steps

1. Overview

Montana's 2026 midterm general election saw strong voter participation and was fueled primarily by national political dynamics and a contested western Congressional race. Three federal races were on the ballot, along with 125 seats in the state legislature, one supreme court justice race, and three ballot measures. While federal outcomes largely tilted tremendously towards Democrats, gains in Montana were more measured although they certainly had a good night here as well.

While Basin Strategies Group (BSG) does not work directly in elections, we closely track outcomes and trends as they relate to strategy development in upcoming natural resource and water policy-making deliberations.

2. Federal races, outcomes

The most competitive race this cycle was in Montana's First Congressional District where Republican Aaron Flint faced Democrat Sam Forstag. With around 90% reporting, **Forstag** had an approximate 6,000-vote lead. Forstag will be the first Democrat to represent Montana in the U.S. House in three decades. In the statewide U.S. Senate race, Republican Kurt **Alme** comfortably won election to the open seat over the Democrat and Independent candidates, replacing retiring Senator Daines. Notably, the combined vote total for Democrat Alani Bankhead and independent Seth Bodnar exceeded Alme's in the total count reported so far. And in the Second Congressional District incumbent Rep. Troy **Downing** also easily won re-election.

3. State Legislative Races

Generally, the outcome of the state legislative races in 2026 means that the balance of power and dynamics in Helena remain similar to the 2025 session. Democrats were able to pick up two seats in both chambers – in the Senate picking up a race in the core of Great Falls and another seat that spans Park and Gallatin Counties, and in the House they picked up a seat in Columbia Falls and another in the core of Great Falls. One race in Billings, between Republican Curtis Schomer and Democrat Tucker Colvin, is possible to go to a recount. That brings the **balance of power in the Senate to 30 Republicans and 20 Democrats and in the House to 55 Republicans to 44 Democrats** (with the recount still pending but favoring the Republican incumbent).

The real battle for power in the legislative process occurred in the June primary where, particularly on the Republican side, but to a lesser extent on the Democratic side as well, battles between the more centrist and purist wings of the parties battled out for control within their parties. While there were certainly wins and losses for both factions within the Republican battle, on balance there are about an equal number of more centrist members of their party returning in the next legislative session (around 8-10 in the Senate and 15-17 in the House). The result is that once again, we would expect heavy tensions between these factions of the Republican caucus to flavor the personality and policy fights of the 2027 session. That gives centrist

Republicans an important swing role, they can join Democrats or conservative Republicans to form a majority and pass legislation. Finally, the campaign season also produced more tensions and possible discontent within the Democrat caucus as well.

Several champion legislators who are well versed in water and natural resource issues are also slated to return on both sides of the aisle (Galt, Miner, K. Williams, Curdy, et al). However, BSG is still of the mind that there is more work to do to increase the general level of knowledge on water law and policy within both chambers and parties ahead of the session and will continue to prioritize that work in the coming weeks.

4. Supreme Court race and ballot measures

Montana's supreme court races (and all judicial elections) are nonpartisan, but most political analysts would agree that the candidate that was more heavily supported by progressive leaning groups, Amy Eddy, easily won her election over Dan Wilson that was more heavily supported by conservative leaning causes. In addition, two constitutional amendments passed by wide margins to enshrine the non-partisan nature of judicial elections (CI-122) as well as codifying procedures related to citizens initiatives in the Montana Constitution (CI-123). Last session a tremendous amount of political energy went into the fight over partisan judicial elections, so it will be notable that those tensions have now been resolved by voters. Voters also resoundingly passed a citizen initiative designed to reduce the influx of political spending in elections (I-194).

3. Next steps and recommendations

a. Recommendations related to federal outcomes: In recent years Montana's delegation has lost significant seniority and policy expertise with no member having served more than two years in Washington to date. The primary goal of clients should be relationship building with newly elected Sen. Alme and Rep. Forstag as well as continuing brass tacks relationship management with Sheehy and Downing. There is a tremendous amount of basic issue education that can and should occur on water issues with the delegation.

b. Legislator-elects will convene in Helena the week of November 10-13th for leadership elections and orientation. Caucuses in both chambers will nominate leaders (for Speaker and President), choose party leadership, and elect Committee on Committees (Senate). BSG will be closely monitoring the outcomes of those elections and build appropriate strategy with clients to ensure well-structured committees.

i. The primary task ahead is to work within the outcome of caucus elections to affect key committee appointments (notably House Appropriations, Senate Finance and Claims, appropriations subcommittees, Natural Resources, Fish and Game, et al). Again, BSG will be tracking closely discussions with new leadership around committee appointments and leadership (chairs and vice chairs) within them.

ii. All members elected to the legislature are now eligible to request bill drafts and begin working with Legislative Services to draft legislation in the 2027 Session. We will be helping work with clients to set up meetings with incoming legislators to discuss ideas and bill draft concepts with members in the coming weeks. We also continue to work on bill development.

iii. Education and training on water policy and natural resource issues should be prioritized across both parties and chambers. BSG is committed to increasing the knowledge base before session.