

## 2016 Montana Public Service Commissioner Races: Candidate Answers and Additional Comments

### **I. Public Service Commissioner #3**

a. *Question: "Do you support or oppose expanding programs that provide aid to low-income families who cannot afford to pay utility bills?"*

**i. Pat Noonan, Democrat: Support**

**ii. Caron Cooper, Independent: Did Not Reply**

**iii. Roger Koopman, Republican: Did Not Reply**

1. "Depends on the program. I favor much greater (or exclusive) use of the utility companies' Universal Service Benefit (USB) funds being devoted to low income support purposes (like Energy Share, etc., etc.) rather than other, less needed "pet projects." I do not support raising the USB charges on rate-payers power bills, as this ultimately hurts the poor most of all. By far, the most effective way of helping low income energy customers is for the PSC to vigorously oppose unjustified rate increases, while insisting upon the most AFFORDABLE forms of energy, combined with the best-run, most efficient utility companies, with the goal of creating LOWER rates in the near future. These are exactly the priorities I have actively fought for on the PSC over the past four years -- and will continue to!"

b. *Question: "Do you support programs intended to improve the energy efficiency of housing stock for low-income Montanans through improvements such as insulation, windows, efficient heat, etc.?"*

**i. Pat Noonan, Democrat: Yes**

**ii. Caron Cooper, Independent: Did Not Reply**

**iii. Roger Koopman, Republican: Did Not Reply**

1. ""Again, it depends on the program. The PSC does not pass laws. The legislature does. So we have absolutely no authority over what tax-funded governmental programs exist. However, in our capacity as utility regulators, we can strongly encourage power companies to "amp up" their Energy Efficiency (EE) programs to benefit lower income customers. I believe there is much more that these utility monopolies can -- and should -- do in this area, without charging the costs back to the rate-payer. It is simply good corporate policy, and their shareholders should be willing to pay for it. I have always been an outspoken advocate for this on the commission. But I must again emphasize that none of these assistance programs, public or private, will be of any consequence if Montana's energy consumers are being forced to pay for inefficient, high-cost forms of energy, merely because they are "politically correct." Frankly, the wealthy, east coast environmental extremists who push their agendas on Montana couldn't care less how much

they make our power bills skyrocket, and how much they make low income folks (and all Montanans) suffer."

## II. **Public Service Commissioner #4**

- a. *Question: "Do you support or oppose expanding programs that provide aid to low-income families who cannot afford to pay utility bills?"*

**i. Bob Lake, Republican: Support**

1. "This issue is not within the purview and authority of the Public Service Commission, however, I do everything within my power to keep prices low."

**ii. Gail Gutsche, Democrat: Support**

1. "The federally funded Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is available to people who are unable to afford to heat their dwellings (apartment or home) during the winter. People may apply for LIEAP through their local Human Resources Development Council (HRDC) office between the months of October and April. Customers who qualify, based on income and heating costs, will have their heating bill reduced through the winter months. I strongly support LIEAP. I also support Energy Share, a non-profit organization, which helps folks facing an emergency such as a furnace outage or steep medical bills, to keep the heat on. Once again, applications are processed through your local HRDC."

- b. *Question: "Do you support programs intended to improve the energy efficiency of housing stock for low-income Montanans through improvements such as insulation, windows, efficient heat, etc.?"*

**i. Bob Lake, Republican: Yes**

1. "The PSC has recently modified the terms of Utility USB programs to increase the level of low income assistance programs"

**ii. Gail Gutsche, Democrat: Yes**

1. "If you qualify for LIEAP, it may mean that the home you rent or own can be weatherized at no charge to you. Weatherizing includes such things insulating around windows and doors, wrapping hot water heaters and sealing air leaks. These measures can save you money as well as conserve energy."