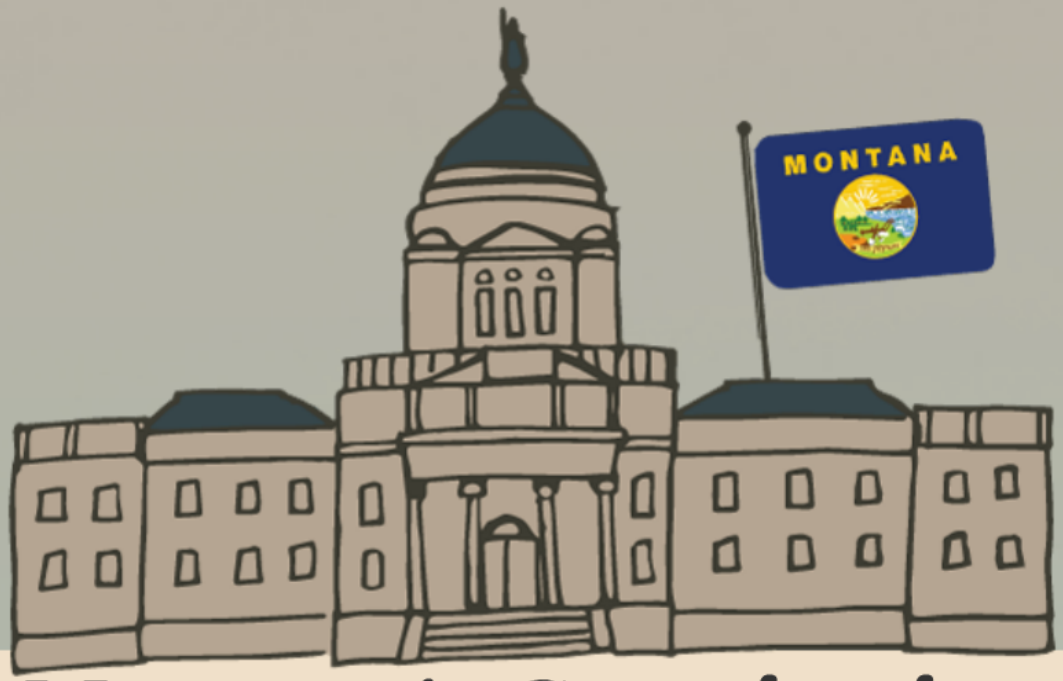
Hi! I'm Linda McCulloch, Montana's Secretary of State.



Montana's Constitution

"Our constitution is an incredible document that was written by Montanans for Montanans. It has stood the test of time, and continues to uphold the values that we as citizens still hold true today."

Timeline

First Constitution

- Did you know that the first constitution which was intended for Montana's statehood was written during a six day meeting? This version of our constitution was lost on the way to the printer.
- A second constitution was written and ratified in 1884, but Congress failed to take any action to approve Montana's admission into the Union.
- In a special election held on Oct. 1, 1889, Montanans adopted a state constitution.

Cool Fact!
Montanans had their own constitution a month before they became an official state!

1889

Constitutional Amendment

- In 1905 the Legislature proposed a constitutional amendment to allow Montanans to bypass the Legislature and adopt or repeal state law through citizen initiative or referendum.
- The proposal was overwhelmingly approved by voters the following year.

1905

Women Win the Right to Vote!

- The legislature passed the law giving women the right to vote in 1913. Montanans approve the measure during the 1914 general election.

Cool Fact!
Montanans' elect the first ever female to serve in the U.S. Congress. Jeannette Rankin upon her election said "I may be the first woman member of Congress but I won't be the last."

1913

26th Amendment

- Montana was the 8th state to ratify the 26th Amendment, giving 18-year-olds the right to vote.

Cool Fact!
Our very own, Senator Mike Mansfield was integral in the amendment's passage.

1971

Constitutional Convention

- Montana held a constitution convention to significantly revise and reform the state constitution in 1972.

"A constitutional convention is a gathering for the purpose of writing a new constitution or revising an existing one"

- On June 6th of that year the voters of Montana voted to uphold the changes to the constitution made at the convention.
  - Creating our new constitution was no easy task! Delegates to the convention included: 14 lawyers, 10 farmers/ranchers, 17 business - owners, 15 teachers, 7 housewives, 1 beautician, 1 graduate student & 4 newspapers. Delegates ranged from 24 to 75 years old.

1972

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1972

Now that you know about the history of our constitution, you're probably wondering

"What's in Our State Constitution?"

Preamble

A preamble is an introductory statement to a document. The preamble to the Montana constitution reads as follows:

We the people of Montana grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains, and desiring to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations do ordain and establish this constitution.

14 Sections

Our constitution has 14 sections that outline various functions of our government.

Compact with the United States
Environment and Natural Resources
Local Government
The Judiciary Branch
Department of Institutions
Constitution Revision
Education and Public Lands
The Executive Branch
Suffrage and Elections
General Government
General Provisions
Revenue and Finance
Declaration of Rights
The Legislative Branch

State Constitutions are a detailed document regarding the day-to-day relationships between the government and the people.

State constitutions outline the structure of the state's government and address issues deemed important to the state's residents.

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How Does Our State Constitution Work?

Our Constitution is a compact that guides the relationship between the people and the government.

Laws and our Constitution

Our constitution is the ultimate law of Montana. All laws created by the Legislature or through citizen initiative must comply with the values and rules our constitution has deemed important.

Can the Constitution be changed?

Each state has its own rules and procedures that govern how its constitution can be amended.

In Montana the constitution can only be changed in a few ways.

Amendment

Initiated Constitution Amendment
Any Montanan can amend the constitution by first gathering signatures of at least 10% of the electors in the state. The amendment then goes on the ballot to be voted on by registered voters.

Legislatively-Referred Constitution Amendment
The Montana State Legislature can propose that a constitutional amendment be placed on the ballot. In order to do this, the legislative body must vote in favor of the amendment by a 2/3 vote of the entire legislature. Registered voters will then vote on the amendment.

Constitutional Convention

The legislature with a vote of 2/3 can propose that a constitutional convention be held. The question of holding a convention will then be placed on the ballot for Montanans to vote on.

We as citizens can also petition for a convention to revise, alter, or amend our state constitution.

In order to do this the petition must be signed by at least 10% of the qualified electors in Montana. That number has to include at least 10% of the qualified electors in each of 40 legislative house districts.

"As the Secretary of State, I receive the petitions and tabulate the certified signatures. If enough certified signatures are collected it is then placed on the next general election ballot! "

Still Curious?

Want more information about the Montana State Constitution? Here are some helpful links that will get you going.

Montana PBS documentary on the MT Constitution Convention: http://watch.montanapbs.org/video/1481142184/

Read the full Constitution here: http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca_toc/CONSTITUTION.htm