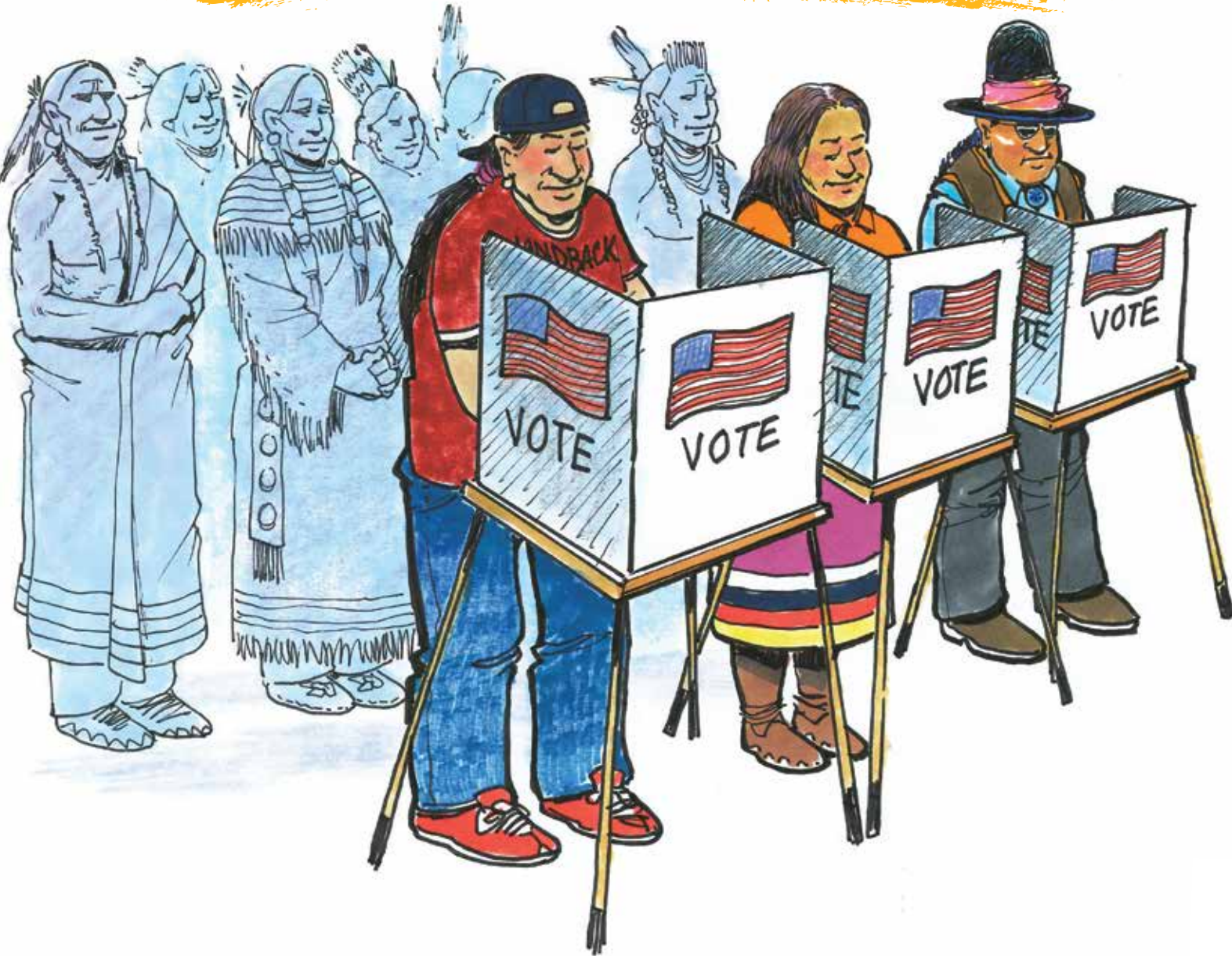


CULTURE IS OUR CURE

# NATIVE *Wellness* LIFE

Voting Fall 2024

Special VOTING Edition



**NO VOTE  
LEFT BEHIND**



## On the Cover

No matter who you are or from what tribe you come, the Native vote matters much in Montana. That vote could help determine the makeup of the U.S. Senate. So, get out and vote for your values, help elect the best leaders to respect and represent our values and way of life.

All illustrations by JOHN POTTER  
johnpotterstudio.com



EDITOR IN CHIEF/CO-OWNER  
Orville Desjarlais Jr.  
Orville@NativeWellness.Life

CREATIVE DESIGN/CO-OWNER  
Debbie Desjarlais  
Debbie@NativeWellness.Life

ASSISTANT EDITOR  
Louis A. Arana Jr.  
Louis@NativeWellness.Life

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER  
Dacia Lucas Clark  
Dacia@NativeWellness.Life

DISTRIBUTION  
Gabriella Belcher  
Gabriella@NativeWellness.Life

CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
John Christian Hopkins

PROOF READER  
Elizabeth G. Arana

PUBLICATION  
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World Headquarters: Billings, Mont.

CONTACT  
Email: Info@NativeWellness.Life  
Call toll free: (888) 835-6419  
Mail: P.O. Box 51464, Billings MT 59105

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## Who can or cannot vote

### You can vote in Montana if you are:

- 18+ years old on or before the next election.
- A citizen of the United States.
- A Montana resident for at least 30 days.
- A felon who is NOT currently incarcerated.

### You cannot vote in Montana:

- If you are a convicted felon currently serving in a penal institution.
- If a court of law judged you to be of unsound mind.
- After serving a felony prison sentence people can vote, even if they're on parole or probation



## Helpful tips for Montana voters

- ✓ Regular registration closes 30 days before an election. Miss the cutoff? Montana offers late registration until noon the day before the election. Contact your tribal voting office.
- ✓ Voting absentee? Track your ballot status at [app.mt.gov/voterinfo](http://app.mt.gov/voterinfo).
- ✓ If the machines are down at your polling place, ask for a paper ballot.
- ✓ If you make a mistake on your ballot, ask for another one.
- ✓ Voting on election day? Find your polling place at [www.voteinmt.org/where-to-vote](http://www.voteinmt.org/where-to-vote).
- ✓ Research your candidates ahead of time, so your vote matches your issues.

## Stop bullying at the polls

Don't put up with voter intimidation. It is illegal to intimidate voters and a federal crime for anyone to interfere with your right to vote as you choose. Report incidents to your local election officials. Their offices are open on Election Day.

If you run into a problem or have questions on Election Day, call the Election Protection Hotline: 1-866-OUR-VOTE—(866) 687-8683.

Problems using your tribal ID? Call the Montana Tribal ID Hotline for help at (406) 444-3702.

## Numbers to call Montana election offices

Big Horn	(406) 665-9796	Glacier	(406) 873-3609	Pondera	(406) 271-4000
Blaine	(406) 357-3240	Hill	(406) 265-5481	Ravalli	(406) 375-6550
Carbon	(406) 446-1220	Lake	(406) 883-7268	Roosevelt	(406) 653-6250
Cascade	(406) 454-6803	Lewis & Clark	(406) 447-8339	Rosebud	(406) 346-7318
Chouteau	(406) 622-5151	Lincoln	(406) 283-2302	Sanders	(406) 827-6922
Daniels	(406) 487-5561	Missoula	(406) 258-4751	Silver Bow	(406) 497-6342
Flathead	(406) 758-5535	Park	(406) 222-4110	Valley	(406) 228-6226
Gallatin	(406) 582-3060	Phillips	(406) 654-2423	Yellowstone	(406) 683-3720

## Remember these 2024 voting season dates

- **September 20** Military and overseas general election ballots mailed.
- **October 7** Early voting begins.
- **October 10** General election ballots for absentee voters mailed.
- **November 5** General Election Day (polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.).

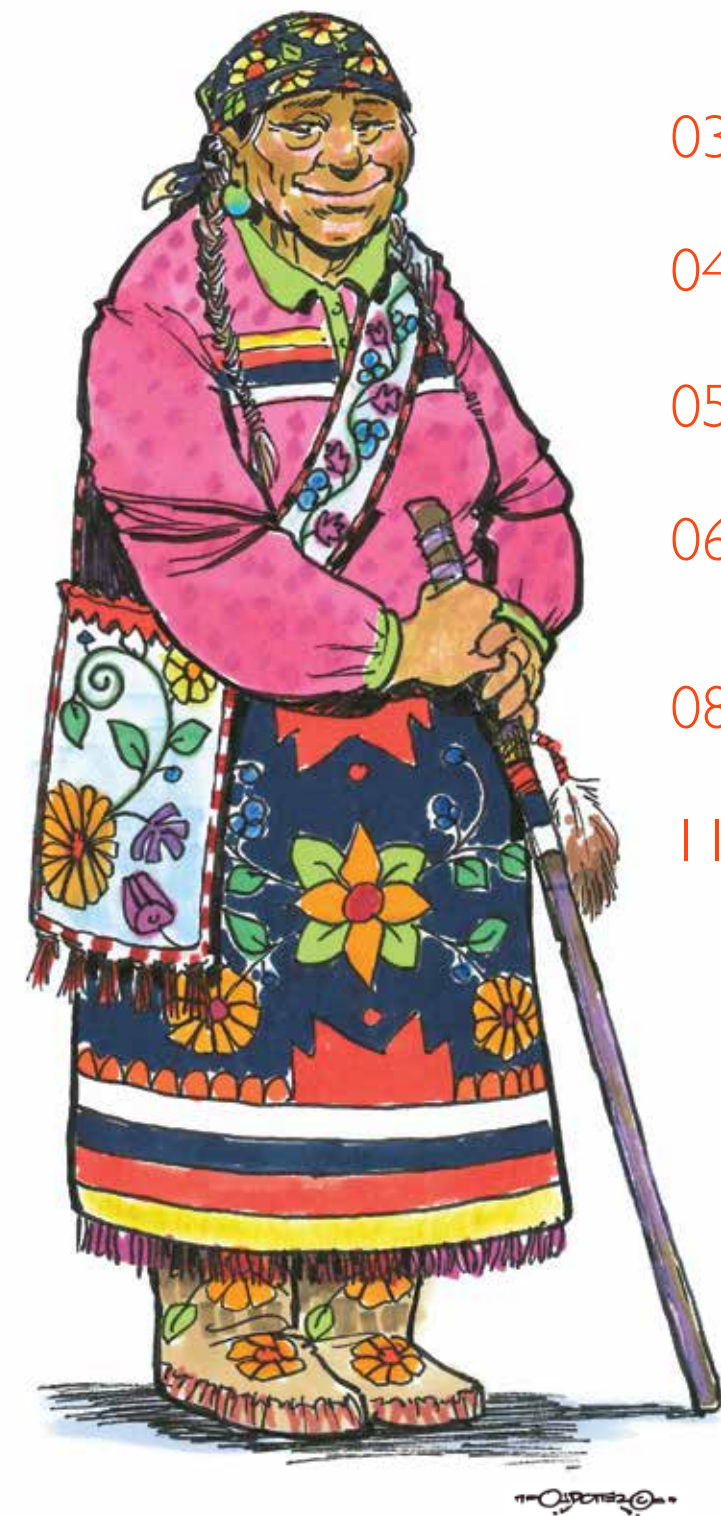
### Register

You need to visit your local county elections office in person to register.

### Voting Problems?

Call Western Native Voice at (406) 869-1938.

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These tips will help Montana voters
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## Voting for your values helps pick the best political leaders

By Orville Desjarlais  
Turtle Mountain Chippewa  
NativeWellness.Life editor in chief

This fall, you will be asked to vote for a president. Despite all the campaign circus noise generated by both parties, it's wise to ignore it and focus on why you want to vote.

### Figure out your WHY and you'll figure out your WHO.

Regardless of your party, vote for the person who most reflects your values. The beliefs and ideals you hold dear. For example, some tribes have a word for rich given to people highly regarded in the community for sharing and gift-giving. The word has nothing to do with having a lot of money, expensive cars, or Rolex watches. This Native American word showcases two opposing values. One honors the act of sharing. The other puts rich people on a pedestal for having more money than others.

Many of our values differ.

Having served in the Air Force for 23 years, including frequent tours in combat zones, I view the presidential position differently. The president is the commander in chief of the military. Ultimately, it's a civilian in charge of the best military force in the world. Our country's founders feared a military coup, so they put a civilian in charge of its military. That's why the military doesn't allow politics in its ranks, especially when in uniform.

If a president turned the military into a political tool, he or she could use it to overthrow the government.

With the power to send daughters and sons to war to die for their country, a president must be honest. I couldn't think of a bigger dishonor than to die for a lie.

In the Air Force, I was honored to meet presidents, foreign leaders and celebrities. It was part of my public affairs job.

In 1995, Bill Clinton lied about a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky. He perjured himself in court. It shocked the public and made global headline news. Because of the lie, I lost faith in Bill Clinton. What else was he willing to lie about? I had three opportunities to shake Clinton's hand, but I turned them all down because I had lost respect for him.

Back then, there was kind of an unwritten rule that presidents didn't lie to the public.

Being dishonest on the campaign trail was somewhat expected. But things have changed. Lying is an everyday occurrence. Today, the public struggles to determine lies from truths.

Many of your daily decisions are based on your values. If you enjoy fishing and hunting, you most likely respect the environment. If you like to breathe clean air and have safe drinking water then you value regulations

that require corporations to stop polluting Mother Earth.

Many times, your values as an Indigenous person align with your tribe's values. It's passed down from generation to generation.

If caring for elders and children is important to you, don't support a political party that wants to cut funding for the programs designed to help them.

For political reasons, 12 states ended a national program that helped feed poor children—just as they got out for summer break.

Or they deny healthcare for children who identify as two spirits.

We're human, so we take care of all our children.

You can't pick and choose which children you want to help or not help.

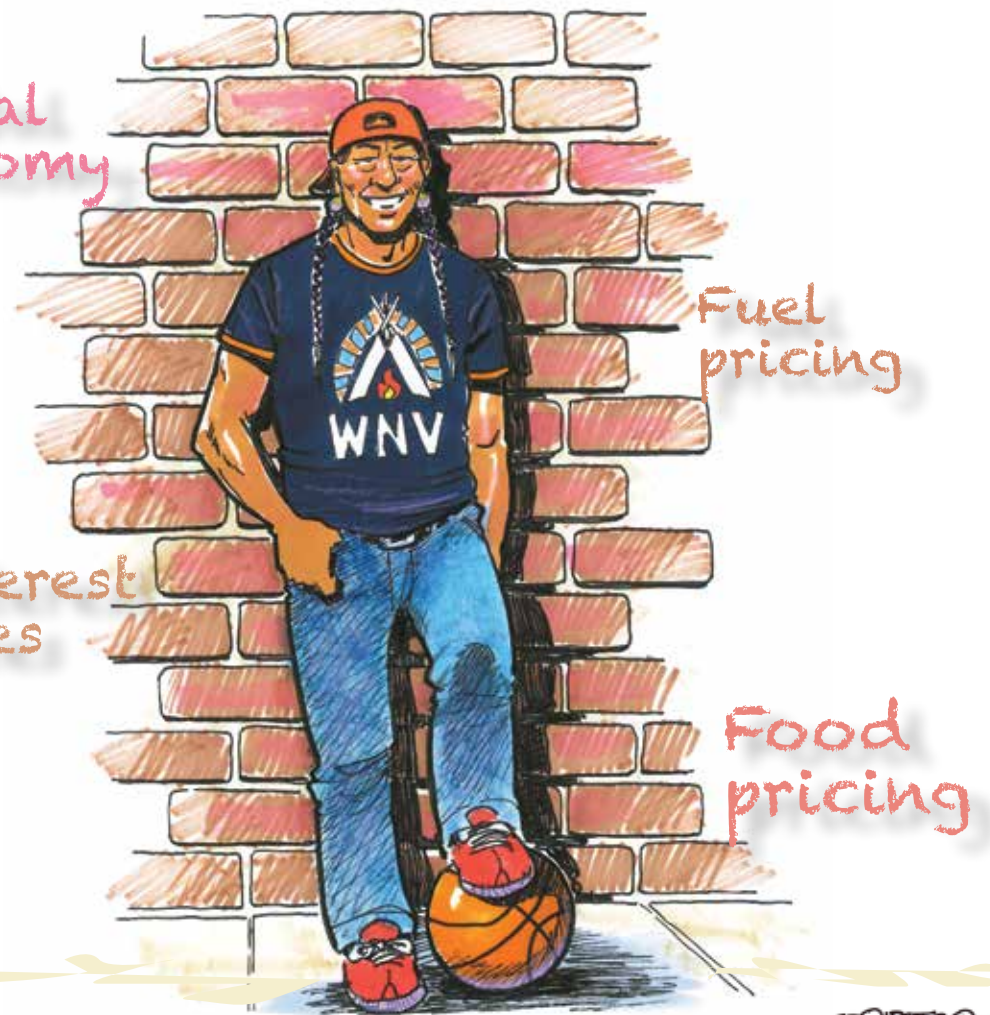
So, take a minute to reflect on your values and match those with politicians who can help you choose our country's next best leaders.

Global economy

Fuel pricing

Interest rates

Food pricing



## Unfounded reasons to vote for a presidential candidate

By Orville Desjarlais  
Turtle Mountain Chippewa  
NativeWellness.Life editor in chief

Many people vote for a president for all the wrong reasons.

People think U.S. presidents have some sort of superpower that allows them to control a global economy, lower inflation, and drop gas prices.

None of this is true.

### Global economy

Many vote for a presidential nominee who promises to bring down inflation or stop a recession.

These people are uninformed.

Presidents can't promise to lower inflation because we all live in a global economy. Usually, the rest of the world joins the United States during inflationary times and recessions. When

fuel prices rise, the cost of delivering goods and services increases, which causes inflation. Prices rise when companies must increase employee pay because of a lack of workers. If you Google *global inflation*, you'll see that the United States falls in line with most other countries. Global inflation is expected to decline from 8.8% in 2022 to 4.1% in 2024, says to the International Monetary Fund. The United States is doing better than predicted. In July the average inflation rate was between 2.5% and 3.2%.

Whether it's inflation or a recession, the president—or any national leader—has little or no effect on a global economy.

### Interest rates

If you've ever taken out a bank loan, you're familiar with interest rates. These are the fees banks charge for loaning you

money. For example, if you borrowed \$1,000 at an interest rate of 10%, you'd expect to pay \$100 for the loan.

The Federal Reserve regulates the interest rate using a formula to control inflation. Presidents have no control over interest rates.

The Fed raise interest rates to battle inflation. It cuts them when the economy is weak or needs a boost because of high unemployment.

To the dismay of many presidents, the Federal Reserve doesn't answer to anybody. They are independent because the U.S. economy will not bend to political will. Politics cannot control a global economy. When the United States feels a recession, that feeling is felt globally. In other words, the United States is not unique.

UNFOUNDED continued on Page 10

### Values:

A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgement of what is important in life.

### What values are important to you?

List the values important to you, then see if the person you're voting for has the same values.

For help choosing Montana candidates, see voting app story on Page 11. List your values:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# From addict to voting advocate

## Social influencer getting Montana felons to the polls

By Louis A. Arana Jr.  
NativeWellness.Life assistant editor  
Borinqueno

Going back to the drug life that landed him in a Montana prison is something Jonas Nichols vowed to never do again.

Nichols went to prison in 2017 on a drug charge. A felony. It changed his life overnight.

Inside, he got sober and kicked opiates, mostly through his own self-help efforts. There he heard things about life and his rights as a felon when he got out.

“I learned—not so much about voting—but how much the government” affects a felon’s life, said Nichols, a Turtle Mountain Chippewa enrolled member and Colville descendant. “And about all the negative impacts (a felony has) on your life.”

When he got out in 2020, he just wanted to get back to his life before opiates. But he was a felon, a forever label and social black mark. That puts roadblocks in his life.

But Nichols didn’t let the label define him. He moved to Colombia Falls, Mont., in the Flathead Valley, where he’s lived most of his life. Then he got a job at the nearby F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber sawmill, sweeping up sawdust.

It was then, as he swept, that he told himself “I am not going back to drugs.” After a while, he decided to go back to school. But Stoltze liked him and his work ethic and asked him to stay.

Nichols stayed because he liked and excelled at his job, he said. And because they

“sent me to school to be an industrial electrician.” Still in school, he said, “I’m going after a bachelor’s in controls engineering.”

Then he also landed the part of a tribal police officer in the television hit series *Yellowstone*. And he went online as a social influencer and now has over 110,000 followers, collectively.

His online advocacy and influencing caught the eye of the Montana social welfare nonprofit Western Native Voice. It builds the political and personal power of Native communities, to affect the

“If you don’t vote, then you can’t really complain about what’s going on, or help make change.”

—Jonas Nichols

policies that affect them. NWV advocates for voting and it’s No Vote Left Behind 2024 Montana campaign includes reaching and registering felons eligible to vote.

WNV asked Nichols if he would help advocate for felons to vote. To be the “voice,” a voting activist for the campaign.

Nichols said yes. “It was really neat that we’re (felons) still allowed to participate” in voting, “to still be a part of society in that matter.”

But he really didn’t know what he was getting into. “I’ll be honest, I didn’t even know felons could vote. I was unaware,” Nichols said. In prison, he’d heard that, “once you become a felon, you lose your rights for everything, including voting.”

Not so. Montana doesn’t let people vote who are in

jail for a felony. But once out on parole, probation or after they complete their sentence, felons regain their voting rights. They can register to vote and cast a ballot.

That’s what Nichols tells other felons. He educates them about their rights. About why it’s so important for them to vote. For one thing, with their vote they can help change outdated laws that often make life harder for felons. Even after they complete their sentence.

But many Montana felons and people in Native communities are not voting, Nichols said. He reminds people to consider what voting is. And what’s at stake. “The people in office are ... making decisions on your behalf,” he

said. They make laws that affect Native communities, and felons. “So, why wouldn’t you want to be a part of that?”

It doesn’t take much effort to research and find candidates they can relate to, he said. “Those who believe the kind of stuff you do or who follow your lifestyle.”

Those in office and lawmakers draft and pass laws. Many affect Native people and communities, and felons. And they manage the money. “They control our ability to go to school, our medical—everything,” Nichols said.

He didn’t grow up on a reservation. But if he had, Nichols said, the laws that affect felons “would probably affect me even more.”

Nichols’ voting advocacy, his social media outreach,

is nonpartisan. He’s clear about that.

What’s important is the “value of voting—and how it affects your life,” he said. “Especially for felons. Because we live under a whole other set of rules.”

Rules can change based on who’s in office and what laws pass, Nichols said. These rules don’t just affect felons. Native communities often don’t get a say in laws that affect them.

Nichols works to change that for everyone, not just felons. That means voting. To make an informed choice. To have your voice heard.

“Think of it as if you are with a group of friends deciding on where to eat,” he said. “They’re voting to go somewhere you don’t like. But you didn’t vote—so you can’t really say anything.”

Nichols takes his voting advocacy seriously. Big voter turnout does affect change. In 2024, the Native vote has clout, especially in Montana. That block of votes could change elections, amendment proposals, and more.

Reminding people of that is his mission now. He speaks out on his social media accounts. Educating. Explaining. Urging felons to register and cast their vote. He’s made billboards. And he’s made videos for WNV using light, subliminal messaging and humor.

Nichols thinks the government “doesn’t really care to advertise to our (felon) demographic. Maybe because they are not a big population. “They’re pretty much last on the list.”

He wants to change that. It’s why he advocates for voting.

“If you don’t vote,” Nichols said, “then you can’t complain about what’s going on, or help make change.”



Jonas Nichols survived addiction and prison and is now an industrial electrician, actor, influencer and voting advocate.



Jonas Nichols helps get Montana felons to the polls.

## One man’s path to redemption

Jonas Nichols’ path from addict, to felon, to social influencer and voting advocate started with an all-too-familiar fact in Native communities—addiction.

As a bodybuilder in his 20s, he hurt himself badly. He had nine surgeries in two years. For the pain, he took his prescribed pain killers.

“I became addicted to opiates,” he said. A slave to a killer. “I started selling them. I started living the life of a drug addict.” It led to a “fast downward spiral” until the law caught up.

“I ended up going to prison over it,” he said. He was there from 2017-2020.

While sobering up in a Montana prison, he did much soul searching. He also learned all he could about addiction and self-help. Before he got out of prison, he overcame addiction through “my own efforts,” he said.

Nichols found work at the F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber sawmill, near Columbia Falls, Mont. It’s there that he made a life-changing decision.

“I was not going to go back” to the life that landed him in prison, he said. And he hasn’t.

By Louis A. Arana Jr.

## Pledge to Vote Campaign

### Push full on to 'activate' for Montana's Native voters

By John Cristian Hopkins  
Narragansett

Most of Montana's reservations are large, land-based tribal nations in their own right, but voting there still isn't easy.

Crow Reservation, for example, is vast. About the size of Connecticut. Most of its people live in extremely rural locations.

"Making it to polling places can be a challenge," said Janine Pease, Crow tribal member. She is one voice behind Western Native Voice, a Montana social justice nonprofit.

WNV nurtures and empowers new Native leaders and affects policies affecting Native Americans through community organizing, education, leadership, and advocacy.

The group is pushing its Pledge to Vote Campaign to get Native voters interested

and active in the 2024 election. It is also working to end the obstacles—like difficulty getting to the polls—that prevent higher Native voter turnout.

"In an area of high poverty, having gas money ... having a reliable car can be nearly impossible for many people," Pease said. "Some locations can be 20 to 30 miles away from the nearest polling place."

If that isn't enough of an obstacle, the state placed a slippery finger on the scale.

"Montana installed new voter restrictions. If you miss an election, you become 'an inactive voter,' requiring that you re-register," she said.

The people behind the campaign founded WNV in 2022. Chair Pat Smith is an enrolled member of the Assiniboine tribe at Fort Peck Indian Reservation. His family runs a wheat farm.

"We have our first permanent home/office in

Billings and have experienced massive growth. More than double capacity—and staff and budget—than just a few years ago.

"We are rolling. The last statewide Democrat (Sen. Jon Tester) is still standing in Montana," he said. "Tester is a Native champion. He is also the most endangered democratic senator in the Senate and one of the most hotly contested Senate races in the nation."

Smith's Montana-based law practice specializes in Indian law, and he has represented tribes for 31 years. He has an undergraduate degree in history and political science and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Montana.

It has been a long, slow fight for voter equity, which continues in Montana's Indian Country.

WNV and five of seven Montana tribes won a major voting rights case. The state

supreme court struck down the legislature's rollback of Native and youth voting rights as unconstitutional under Montana's unique 1972 Constitution, Smith said.

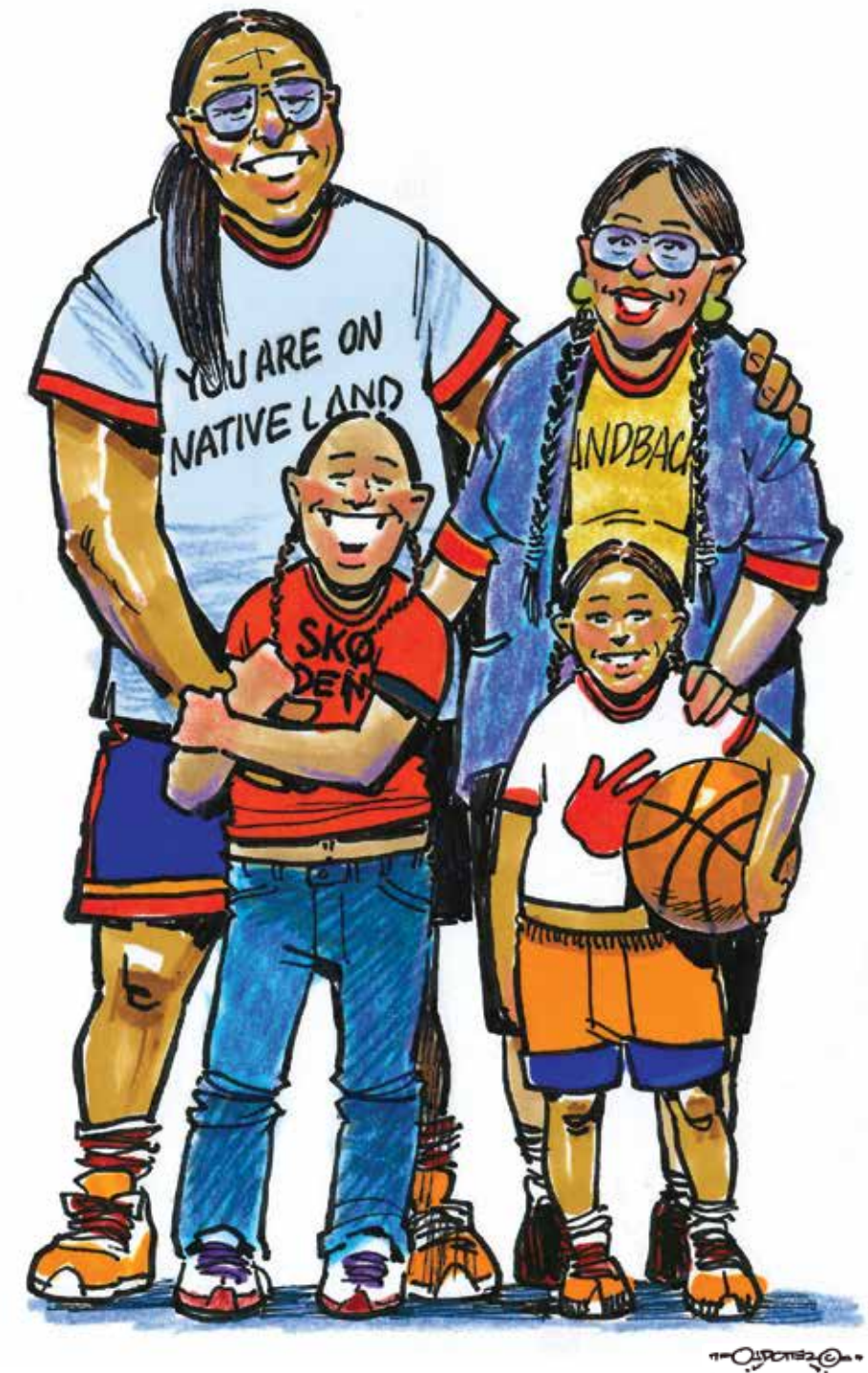
"We had elections stolen from us. Absolutely. Yes, we did," Pease recalled.

A Crow educator and activist, Pease knows all too well about the barriers Crow and Northern Cheyenne faced when trying to vote in Big Horn County, Mont., in the 1980s.

Confronting them—vote-dilution and voter-suppression tactics the American Civil Liberties Union said were reminiscent of the Jim Crow-era South. Pease, then Janine Windy Boy and seven other plaintiffs sued the county in 1983.

U.S. District Judge Edward Rafeedie ruled in *Windy Boy v. Big Horn*

*PLEDGE continued on Page 10*



PLEDGE continued from Page 8

County three years later. He said the county's election system violated the Voting Rights Act. "Past and present discrimination against [the Northern Cheyenne and Crow] makes it more difficult for [them] to participate in the political process," he concluded.

But there are more battles. One is against Montana's insistence that voters show valid ID with their physical address. "Many reservations are served only by centrally located post office boxes," Pease said. Tribal members just don't know their physical address, she said.

When the Crow and Northern Cheyenne began researching the election process, they soon discovered other striking inequalities. Despite their large numbers in Big Horn County, Native people made up less than 3% of government employees,

Pease said. Likewise, in a 35-year career, one high school teacher had never given a Native student a grade higher than a C.

"It was way worse than I ever imagined," Pease said.

Today, WNV engages all seven Montana Indian reservations and urban centers. About half of the state's Native people live off reservations.

The campaign is how the organization raises voter participation. It helps ensure that people hear Native voices and have representation in the political process.

The group wants Native voters to make a pledge to vote.

Studies show that pledging to vote can increase voter participation, the WNV website says. For example, research by The Behavioral Insights Team found that signing a pledge to vote increased turnout by 4.2%

in the Colorado general election and by 4.5% in the Pennsylvania primary. On its webpage, BIT says it creates and applies behavior insights to drive positive change and help people, communities, and organizations thrive.

Also, among first-time voters, the pledge resulted in an 8.8 percentage point increase in turnout compared to those who received a standard mobilization message, studies found.

The WNV website states that a pledge to vote is a simple yet powerful act. It's a personal vow to take part in the democratic process, and it highlights how important each vote is in helping shape the future of Native communities.

But reservation voter turnout is still a challenge, WNV says on its website. The Montana Free Press, cited on the site, said Big Horn County, which includes the Crow

Reservation, had the state's lowest 2024 primary election turnout at 23%. That's down from 28% in 2022. Glacier County, the location of the Blackfeet Reservation, saw a turnout of 26%, the same as in 2022.

To meet the challenge, WNV's Pledge to Vote Campaign uses outreach to get voters to the polls. That includes social media, community events and partnerships with local organizations.

By fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility, WNV aims to make voting a collective effort. And to reinforce the idea that every vote can lead to meaningful change.

**Note:** To learn about the Pledge to Vote Campaign, or to sign the pledge, follow Western Native Voice on social media, or go to [westernnativevoice.org](http://westernnativevoice.org). You'll receive a FREE "Natives Vote" t-shirt as a thank you.

UNFOUNDED continued from Page 5

### Fuel pricing

Many will say they'll pick a president who promises to lower gas prices. This is ridiculous.

The only way a U.S. president could control fuel prices is if the United States owned all the oil wells in the world, which it does not.

Gas prices are dictated by crude oil prices because crude oil is processed into gas. It stands to reason that countries with the most oil wells control fuel prices globally. OPEC, the international oil cartel of 12 countries, produces about 40% of the world's crude oil. Saudi Arabia is the country with the most crude oil. The United States is not part of OPEC, so a U.S. president does not influence that organization.

However, that's just part of the equation. Like everything else in a global economy, supply and demand

play a large part in fuel pricing. During the pandemic, fuel prices were low because nobody was driving. However, as you probably noticed, fuel prices rise before major holidays and during summer break because that's when the demand for fuel is high.

When gas prices get too high, people start blaming the president. Whom we're learning is not to blame.

One trick presidents use is to allow the sale of the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which is set aside for emergencies, like a war. But it's all just a political illusion. It barely affects gas prices because it represents only about two days of the world's oil supply.

In other words, a U.S. president only controls the reserve, which has little to no effect on gas prices.

### Food costs

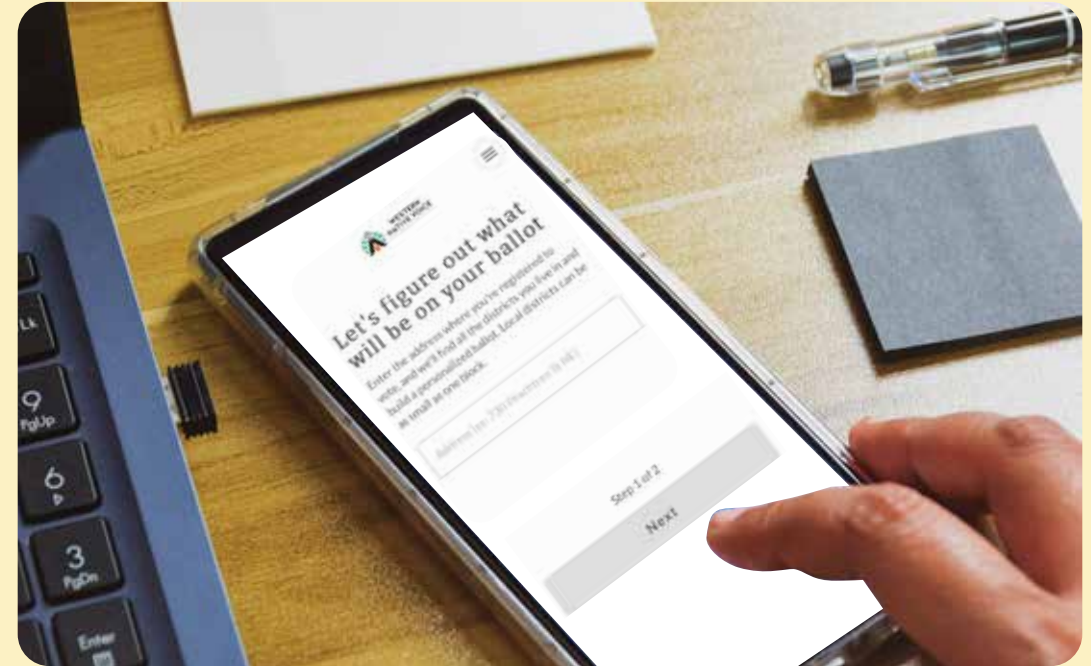
People either blame or vote for people

they think control supermarket food prices. Presidents don't control food pricing.

For example, some people blame the high price of eggs on the president. These people are uninformed. Since 2022, farmers have had to kill 92 million chickens because of the bird flu, says the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This, naturally, means fewer eggs for sale, which also means the farmers must raise the prices to compensate for the fewer chickens laying eggs. Food pricing, like most everything for sale, is based on the concept of supply and demand.

If you only take one thing from this article, understand that supply and demand, not presidents, dictate much of the pricing for food, gas, and other consumer goods and services.

If you plan to vote for a president, do it for all the right reasons.



## Voting app can help you make a choice

By Lacey Gonzales  
Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council  
project director

I heard about the new Western Native Vote voting website, so I gave it a 30-minute test drive. Overall, it was useful — though it could be a bit more user-friendly.

Yes, accessing the website informational part of the ballot selections is easy enough. There are just two simple steps: provide your address and party affiliation. I did appreciate the bio information on the candidates.

I find the website far more useful than the

propaganda force-fed to us through media outlets and unwelcome mailings and texts. I also appreciated that information sources were readily available to help provide transparency.

Also, helpful and in easy-to-understand language was the information about the offices and how the decisions they make can change areas of our lives.

It did have useful information about the candidates. But I was only able to see info about those in the June 4, 2024, election. I could not find information on the November elections,

which Western Native updated later that month.

I was able to make selections for the different political parties, though, even though it was limited.

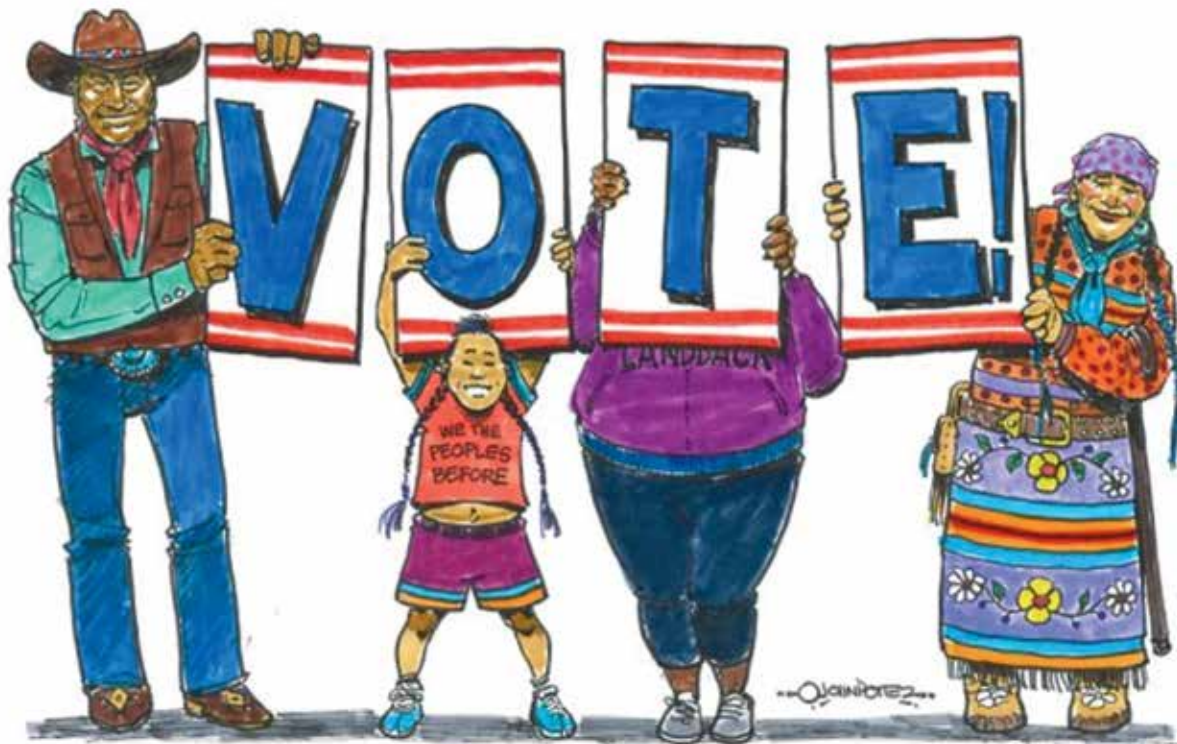
Another nice feature is that you can have your ballot choices printed or emailed. I think any person would find it useful when preparing to place their final decisions.

Again, the site could be a bit more user-friendly, but overall helpful.

But once used to it, it is quite informative. I can see how the site can be a useful tool to anyone who is not familiar with the issues and politics in general.

[wnv.branch.vote](http://wnv.branch.vote)

[westernnativevoice.org/resources/ballot-builder/](http://westernnativevoice.org/resources/ballot-builder/)



## Have a Plan

Having a plan to vote is crucial to ensure that unforeseen challenges don't prevent your voice from being heard on **November 5th**. *Your voice matters!*

## Vote Early

Voting early ensures your vote will be counted. Visit your local county election office starting **October 7th**.  
*Your vote matters!*

## Need a Ride?

Call us and one of our trusted organizers in your area will be dispatched to help you get to the polls or deliver your ballot safely. **No Vote Left Behind!**