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FLATHEAD COUNTY

Affordable housing advocate challenges Abell

By HANNAH SHIELDS
Daily Inter Lake
Report for America

Focused on addressing Flathead County's growing pains, Whitefish resident Nathan Dugan launched his bid to unseat incumbent Commissioner Brad Abell over

the weekend. Abell, who is wrapping up his first term on the county Board of Commissioners, made his reelection bid official on Feb. 16. Dugan, a



DUGAN

35-year-old physical therapist, spends his time visiting homes around Flathead Valley to treat elderly residents. His job has exposed him to the financial and physical barriers his patients face daily, including underfunded infrastructure, gaps in health care and the rising cost of living, he said.

"Our valley is growing incredibly fast," Dugan said in a Feb. 22 statement. "Too often, our local leadership gets stuck playing catch-up. We need practical, proactive and collaborative leadership that gets a handle on these complex issues before they reach a breaking point."

Originally from northeast Ohio, Dugan moved to Whitefish in 2015 after receiving a doctorate of physical therapy at Columbia University, and started working at Logan Health Medical Center in Kalispell. Outside of

See DUGAN, A6

CAMPAIGN SEASON



JEAN CROSS, an election official with Flathead County, places stickers out for voters in the primary election at the Flathead County Fairgrounds in Kalispell on June 7, 2022. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake FILE)

Stage set for multiple contested primaries in Northwest Montana

By HAILEY SMALLEY
Daily Inter Lake

Midway through the candidate filing period, a handful of races in Northwest Montana have emerged as hotbeds of intraparty competition.

Multiple Republicans are set to run in four of the region's top political races, including races for the state House of Representatives, Senate and Public Service Commission.

Three Republicans have registered in House District 4, which includes Columbia Falls and the eastern edge of Whitefish. Business owner Shaun Pandina plans to try his luck in the district after losing the 2024 primary in District 7 to fellow Republican Courtenay Sprunger. He'll face Nathan Purdy, the owner of a medical imaging service, and incumbent Lyn Bennett, a registered nurse. Paula Koch, a Spanish teacher

at Columbia Falls Junior High School, is the only Democrat currently registered in the race.

House District 7, representing the heart of Kalispell, is also posed for a Republican runoff. While neither has registered with the Secretary of State's Office, incumbent Courtenay Sprunger and newcomer Luke Maxwell are both soliciting campaign donations through personal websites.

In the Senate, District 1 is currently posed to be the most competitive race in Northwest Montana, with three candidates vying for the chance to replace long-standing Sen. Mike Cuffe. Former representative Steve Gunderson and local business owner Vincent Backen are both registered as Republicans while Libby mayoral candidate Jonathan Jameson is throwing his hat in the ring as a Democrat.

The race for Public Service Commissioner of District 5, including the eastern side of the Flathead Valley, includes Republican incumbent Annie Bukacek and former commission employee and fellow Republican David Sanders.

A HANDFUL of other races have drawn a single candidate from each side of the aisle so far.

Montana House District 3, including Whitefish and the West Glacier area, is poised for a repeat of the 2024 general election, which saw Democrat Debo Powers face off against Republican Cathy Mitchell.

Democrat Luca Welle, a river guide and substitute teacher, plans to run against incumbent Republican Braxton Mitchell to represent Montana House District 5, which includes Hungry Horse, Coram and Martin City.

In House District 6, which encompasses northwest Kalispell, Republican Jim Riley, a business consultant, is currently slated to run against Democrat Darren Fix, a software engineer, in the general election.

Republican incumbent Mark Noland would compete with Democrat Patrick Fitzpatrick for Senate District 6, which includes the eastern shore and Big Arm of Flathead Lake.

Republican candidates for Senate District 6 and House Districts 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 remained unchallenged as of Feb. 23.

Candidates have through March 4 to file for the primary, so the ballot will likely lengthen for some races. The primary election is set for June 2 and the general election for Nov. 3.

Reporter Hailey Smalley can be reached at 758-4433 or hsmalley@dailyinterlake.com.

HEALTH BOARD

Decision expected on septic regulation changes

By TAYLOR INMAN
Daily Inter Lake

Changes to septic regulations in Flathead County, including the use of gravity septic systems, will be up for a vote on Tuesday.

Flathead-City County Health Board members will decide whether or not to pass along a recommendation to the county commissioners, who will give the final approval. The meeting is set for Feb. 24 at 1 p.m.

The allowance of gravity systems is the largest change to the regulations for on-site sewage treatment systems, which the county has not permitted since 2004.

See SEPTIC, A6

Dems call on White House to refund tariff money

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A trio of Senate Democrats is calling for the government to start refunding roughly \$175 billion in tariff revenues that the Supreme Court ruled were collected because of an illegal set of orders by President Donald Trump.

Sens. Ron Wyden of Oregon, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire are unveiling a bill on Monday that would require U.S. Customs and Border Protection to issue refunds over the course of 180 days and pay interest on the refunded amount.

The measure would prioritize refunds to small businesses and encourages importers, wholesalers and large companies to pass the refunds on to their customers.

"Trump's illegal tax scheme has already done lasting damage to American families, small businesses and manufacturers

See TARIFFS, A6

KEEPING SCORE

IN TODAY'S SPORTS SECTION

Flathead Bravettes
Reese Rosenberg
POSTER PLAYER OF THE WEEK

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