

Government

1 January 2014 David Carter_New JP JY

David Carter is Yellowstone County's newest Justice of the Peace. The former Deputy County attorney was sworn into office yesterday. A few hours later he assumed the waiting Justice Court caseload from his predecessor.

Judge Larry Herman announced last August his intent to retire at the end of 2013.

His tenure was recognized at yesterday's regularly scheduled Yellowstone County Commission meeting.

Commissioner Bill Kennedy says Herman was fair to everyone in his courtroom and will be missed.

KENNEDY: You have been a shining star for us on the JP court and you've brought a lot of new ideas. (:18)

Before serving as Justice of the Peace, Herman was a city judge and a former Mayor in Laurel. The University of Montana law school graduate was admitted to the Montana Bar in 1970.

Herman says Yellowstone County's Justice Court handles between 16-to-20-thousand cases a year. By contrast, he says when he was Laurel's city judge, it was a busy year if the office handled 500-to-700 cases a year.

So when asked later what – if anything – he will miss about Justice Court, Herman says the people.

HERMAN: well you don't miss the volume. You do miss the people and the activity of the office. And hopefully I won't change in terms of activity. I'll find something to keep me occupied. (:15)

Herman says he is already scheduled to hear occasional cases. He and his wife also plan to travel.

As for advice for his successor...

HERMAN: I would probably tell him to be considerate in implementing the law and have an open mind. (:09)

Herman says David Carter is prepared and thinks he will do a good job.

And Carter's former boss – County Attorney Scott Twito – has this piece of advice for the new judge.

TWITO: David as you take the bench the one thing I'm going to take away from Judge Herman both in my personal experience and as I have sent young prosecutors before him to sort of learn the ropes is his temperament and patience with our interns and our attorneys. It's really something to strive for to keep that level of patience (laughter to fade) (:27)

Last November, county commissioners selected Carter to fill the remainder of Herman's term, which concludes at the end of this year. Carter has already said he will seek election to the post later this year.

Carter had been with the Yellowstone County Attorney's office for more than a decade and was a senior trial attorney.

He says like many among the standing room only crowd at his investiture, he too started his legal career before Judge Herman in Justice Court.

CARTER: and I hope to follow in your footsteps in being a judge. As a result of it, I do have one New Year's resolution and that is to be brief, so with that (laughter to fade)

(ambience)

District Judge Gregory Todd administered the oath of office.

After the swearing in ceremony, Carter says he's honored to be appointed to this position. He calls Justice Court the working face of the judiciary for the public.

CARTER: when people are having to come before the court for whatever reason – civil or criminal – it is the justice court, it is the city court. We are the largest Justice Court in the state of MT and so we come face to face with the public every day and so I hope to ensure there is that service, that prompt, professional attitude towards the public.” (:30)

Yellowstone County has two Justices of the Peace. Carter joins Judge Pedro Hernandez, who has been on the bench for about 4 decades.

Justice Court handles initial felony court appearances, misdemeanor cases, protective orders, and some civil cases.

7 Feb 2014 Bullock-Senate Appointment JY

Governor Steve Bullock appointed his Lieutenant Governor to fill the U-S Senate seat formerly held by Max Baucus. Baucus resigned to become the next U-S Ambassador to China.

Bullock made the announcement this morning at the Capitol.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(2:31)

HOST OUT: Republicans quickly criticized the appointment calling it a Big Sky Buyout.

11 Feb 2014 Bullock – Lt Gov choice JY

The newly selected lieutenant governor began her duties today (yesterday) at the Capitol.

Governor Steve Bullock formally named Board of Regents Chair Angela McLean yesterday as his pick to replace John Walsh.

Bullock named Walsh last Friday to fill the remaining term of U-S Senator Max Baucus who was confirmed as U-S Ambassador to China.

Bullock was in Billings to speak to the Montana Association of Counties mid-winter meeting. Afterwards he sat down with Jackie Yamanaka to talk about his recent appointments.

(4:11)

HOST OUT: For more information or to apply for a one of the state boards or commissions you can find a link to the state's site at our web page: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

14 Feb 2014 Daines/Fox – Real ID JY

Congressman Steve Daines plans to introduce legislation that would remove the requirement that set national standards for driver's licenses and identification cards.

The REAL ID Act was part of a 2005 anti-terrorism law. Past attempts to remove the provision have failed.

Daines said during a news conference yesterday at the state Capitol he believes this time the effort will be successful because of widespread concerns about surveillance activities by the National Security Agency.

The Montana Department of Justice oversees the issuance of driver's licenses and identification cards.

Daines was joined by state Attorney General Tim Fox at the announcement. Fox says Montana taken steps to ensure security measures are in place for its licenses and ID's.

FOX: "We've made many significant changes in technology and law requirements on driver's licenses and how they're issued that are designed to make our program very secure while protecting the privacy of Mtns. And unfortunately the federal law is not only overreaching and overbearing and very, very onerous but it does not guarantee the privacy of Mtns will be protected." (:28)

Montana is one of just over a dozen states that have pushed back against the federal government's REAL ID provision. In response the federal government said non-compliance may lead to restrictions in access to certain federal buildings that require an ID and possibly to commercial flights in the future.

The 2007 Montana Legislature unanimously passed a bill to prohibit implementation of REAL ID in the state.

Opposition to REAL ID also comes from the current Governor and the state's Congressional Delegation.

19 Feb 2014 MT's new Lt. Gov/Blgs JY

Angela McLean has been Montana's new Lieutenant Governor for about a week and a half. Shortly after taking office, she hit the road for visits to Great Falls, Missoula and now Billings.

Jackie Yamanaka sat down with McLean during her visit to talk about taking on this new role: Lieutenant Governor.

(3:10)

11 March 2014 Zinke – campaign office JY

U-S House Candidate Ryan Zinke (Zink-ee) officially opened his statewide campaign office in Billings yesterday.

The Republican also announced he has temporarily moved to Billings from Whitefish for the duration of his campaign.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports, Zinke says one of his campaign goals is to heal the rift in the Republican party.

(2:11)

HOST OUT: Yesterday was the last day to file for office in Montana this election year.

In the U-S House race there is an open seat this year. Incumbent Republican Steve Daines instead is running for an open U-S Senate seat.

As of late yesterday afternoon, _____ Republican candidates had filed for the lone House seat and will appear on the June primary election ballot.

17 March 2014 US Interior Sect'y/Boze JY

U-S Interior Secretary Sally Jewell says in this time of constraints on the availability of federal dollars the agency will need help from states, Indian tribes, and others to carry out its mission.

Jewell spent last Friday and the weekend touring Montana with Senator Jon Tester. Jackie Yamanaka joined them Friday evening for a public forum in Bozeman and has this report. (4:06)

AM 26 March 2014 YC Commission – mediator back JY

The Yellowstone County Commission voted unanimously yesterday to bring back the mediator who had been working on resolving the contract dispute between the county and its sheriff's deputies.

Commissioners had set yesterday as the deadline for the commission to vote on the county's "last, best, and final offer." But they delayed that action.

For weeks, representatives for the county and the Montana Public Employees association – the union representing the deputies – have told commissioners they're close to an agreement, but they haven't been able to close the deal.

And in a related development, the union filed an unfair labor practice charge against the county.

Darcy Dahl of MPEA gave commissioners an update yesterday.

DAHL: where we're at right now we're at the cusp of an agreement. When you issued the letter saying vote on what we're going to give you or we're going to regress back to what we did in Oct. That upset the apple cart. There's no two ways about it. We were making progress the reps from the county we had been meeting with were doing a good job and everything had been progressing. And we were very close to an agreement. (:31)

Dahl repeated the request to bring the fact finder back to Billings to continue to mediate talks and then issue her final report.

Commissioner Bill Kennedy says he's surprised both sides don't have a written tentative agreement on what issues have been resolved. And he's disappointed there's NO written report from the fact finder.

KENNEDY: so we know up front what's happening because there are a lot of items. I keep hearing things are close, things are close, but how close are they. And are we ready to wrap this thing up or not. (:15)

In response, Dahl says there's no final report because the work isn't finished.

DAHL: I would hope we continue fact finding and we get this process done. Because your frustration is multiplied by 43 deputies they're just as frustrated as you are. (:09)

A week and a half ago, the deputies again rejected the county's contract offer. The current collective bargaining agreement expired last June, but remains in effect until a new agreement is reached.

Also, last October, the deputies – when they rejected an earlier contract offer – also voted to authorize a strike, but no strike date was set.

DAHL: when the deputies took the strike vote, number one they unanimously voted down the county's offer and when they took the strike vote it wasn't anything but with a sick stomach because the last thing those deputies want to do is strike. And that's the truth and everybody in this room knows it. However, when you leave us with no options the only thing we could come up with was statutory fact finding. (:23)

A mediator met with both sides for one day in January. There was an agreement Sara Adler would return if both sides could not reach a final agreement on their own.

The cost for that one-day of fact finding totaled just over 33-hundred dollars. It was split between the county and the union. It's expected the cost will be about the same when Sara Adler of Los Angeles returns to resume fact finding.

Some tentative dates have been proposed for her return in mid-April and the end of May.

PM 26 March 2014 YC Commission – mediator back JY

A fact-finder is expected to return to Billings next month or in May to try to mediate a contract dispute between Yellowstone County and its sheriff's deputies.

The Yellowstone County Commission voted unanimously yesterday to bring back Sara Adler of Los Angeles.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports, both sides continue to say they're close to resolving their differences.

(3:01)

28 March 2014 Equal Pay Summit JY

The Governor's Equal Pay Summit convenes next week in Bozeman to continue the discussion on how to close Montana's wage gap between men and women.

Author and activist Lilly Ledbetter will kick off the summit with a public speech Monday evening. She's the namesake of the federal act that addresses pay equality.

Jackie Yamanaka has more...

(2:12)

HOST OUT: For more information and links, go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

Environment

4 March 2014 MT Delegation/firefighting costs JY

The Democratic members of Montana's congressional delegation support a change in the way the most catastrophic wildland fires are paid for.

President Barack Obama recently told some western governors that his budget will include their proposal to pay for the largest fires out of a special disaster account.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(3:00)

18 March 2014 Flood Damage JY

Disaster and Emergency officials in Montana are asking individuals and businesses to provide them information about damages from the recent flood event caused by rapidly melting snow and ice jams on area rivers and streams.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports, the information will be gathered across the state to see if the damages were severe enough to warrant a request for federal assistance.

(1:54)

HOST OUT: To find the links to Yellowstone County's on-line flood damage form, go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

For those who live outside Yellowstone County and suffered flood damage, Duane Winslow suggests they contact their county DES office.

Health

20 Jan 2014 Tester – Blgs Food Bank/SNAP JY

Negotiations appear to be winding down in Congress on the long-delayed Farm Bill. And while the debate over cuts to the food assistance program appear to be settled, Montana Senator Jon Tester wanted to find out how the proposed reductions might impact low-income Montanans and what effect – if any – it might have on local food banks. Jackie Yamanaka joined Tester as he toured the Billings Food Bank.
(3:17)

13 Feb 2014 AG Tim Fox on 24/7 ruling JY

State Attorney General Tim Fox says Montana's 24-7 Sobriety Program remains up and running despite a recent state district court decision that declared provisions of the state law unconstitutional.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.
(3:15)

HOST OUT: YPR is part of a multi-public radio station reporting project on the issue of transportation. For more information about Transportation Nation or to read the ruling on this case and the state's appeal, go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

3 March 2014 Lewis campaign/Meals On Wheels JY

Democratic U-S House Candidate John Lewis today (yesterday) launched his tour around Montana... starting from Billings. It will end in Helena later this week when he is to officially file for office.

Jackie Yamanaka caught up with Lewis in the kitchen at the Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County and has this report.
(2:37)

HOST OUT: Throughout the month of March, the Adult Resource Alliance of Yellowstone County is participating in a national campaign to end hunger among seniors.

Six Billings restaurants are participating. For links and more information about the "March for Meals" you can go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

5 March 2014 BC ExpressCare open Hts location JY

The second Billings Clinic Express Care location opened to patients today (yesterday) at an Albertsons in the Heights.

This clinic provides quick primary care services... generally for minor medical issues. As Jackie Yamanaka reports, officials say the goal of these retail clinics is to provide more convenience and access for patients.

(2:22)

HOST OUT: Express Care also can bill most insurance plans. For more information and to see photos, go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

AM 21 March 2014 ACA-March 31 deadline JY

The deadline is approaching fast to enroll for health insurance coverage for the year under the federal Affordable Care Act.

Mike Fierberg is a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services region office in Denver.

CMS developed the on-line marketplace for both Montana and Wyoming since the respective legislatures opted to leave that job to the federal government rather than develop their own.

There have been numerous deadlines leading to the roll-out of individual insurance coverage that began January first.

He says March 31st is the last deadline to enroll for coverage this year.

FIERBERG: because after March 31st the window is going to close. And people who don't have health insurance will not be able to get it with the financial assistance that is being offered by the ACA until next year. They won't be able to enroll in a plan until November 15th and they won't be able to get coverage until next January 1st.

And that may mean a penalty under the individual mandate provision under the ACA.

Fierberg says for those who do enroll and pay their premium by the deadline, coverage will begin May 1st. They also will not be penalized for being uninsured for the first 4 months of the year.

To enroll, Montanans can shop for health insurance via the web, over the phone, or in person with a trained and certified navigator. Either way, Fierberg urges those who are still uninsured to act quickly.

FIERBERG: Again. Don't waste time cause they're getting very very busy at the end of the enrollment period. But if you'd rather do this face to face with somebody it can still be done but you really need to get that process started right away. (:12)

He says that's because it may take time to verify if your health care provider is part of the network in the insurance plan you chose in the Marketplace.

He also advises people have a pay stub or current financial information handy when they are ready to sign-up because the federal subsidy is based on current income.

You can find links about how to sign up at our website – ypradio-dot-org-slash-news

PM 21 March 2014 ACA-March 31 deadline JY

The deadline is approaching fast to enroll for health insurance coverage that becomes effective this year under the federal Affordable Care Act. Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(2:00)

HOST OUT: You can find more information and links about how to sign up for health insurance at the federal Marketplace at our website – ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

AM 25 March 2014 Price bundling/Blgs hospitals JY

The two hospitals in Billings are participating in a Medicare demonstration project that seeks to improve the quality of patient care and control costs.

It's called price bundling. Beginning on January first both Billings Clinic and St. Vincent Health Care agreed to bundle the cost of a total hip and total knee replacement for its Medicare patients.

Chad Miller is the director of Orthopedic and Sports Medicine at Billings Clinic.

MILLER: Hip and knees and orthopedics is the model we chose because we can standardize that model fairly well. We have 8 ortho surgeons that get along really well and can standardize their plans of care. Obviously adjusting to individual needs for the pts.

He says their orthopedic surgeons belong to Billings Clinic.

That's not the case at St. Vincent where it has a contract with OrthoMontana.

Ron Oldfield is the hospital's Chief Financial Officer.

OLDFIELD: it helps us as an organization to work with physicians and drive down costs for these 2 types of procedures. It closely aligns the physicians and the hospitals together to work together to drive down costs for our patients. (:20)

The normal practice is for each provider to separately bill Medicare.

What happens under this price bundling demonstration project, Medicare gives the hospital one-lump sum for the procedure. Then it's up to the hospital to distribute that money to the various providers, such as to the surgeon, anesthesiologist or physical therapist.

There's no impact on Medicare patients. They'll still have their co-pay.

There is a catch for hospitals under price bundling, says Chad Miller.

MILLER: So starting Jan 1 what they did is they took a 2% discount, so we are taking 2% less than the average of the last 3 years with a formula that they're using. So its now our job as a health care system to redesign our care to keep costs down. So as a organization can continue to be, make the money that we need to make to taking care of these pts (:25)

Miller says what that means at Billings Clinic is to make sure the patient is an integral part of team – more educated on the procedure and what's expected of them during their post surgery recovery.

Hospitals are being tracked to make sure these patients aren't being re-admitted to the hospital or sent to a nursing home or long-term care facility.

And there's a reason for that, says Mike Fierberg (fear-berg) is a spokesman for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service's region office in Denver.

FIERBERG: As an incidental but maybe significant benefit it has the potential of saving the Medicare trust fund and thus the taxpayers a significant amount of money on top of that. But if it saves money at the cost of reduced quality of care I think we will judge this demo project not to have been successful. Care is the most important thing on our plate. (:28)

He says only a limited number of hospitals in a limited number of states were accepted into this demonstration project. While he wasn't sure if there were other Montana hospitals in the program, he says it's significant that both Billings hospitals were accepted.

FIERBERG: and since they were eager to join this one I think it gives them a leg up in the terms of the way we would view their participation. They have a good track record in working with us, they certain provide quality care to the people of E MT (:15)

Orthopedics is just one procedure available under price bundling demonstration project. There are just over 40 that hospitals could chose from.

St. Vincent's Ron Oldhouse says price bundling – and in turn more price transparency – is the wave of the future for health care. Some of that he says is because of the federal Affordable Care Act.

OLDHOUSE: we see in a bigger pix of needing to drive down our cost structure and to reeval how we deliver HC and we talk about transformation. All hospitals are faced with the same issue, transf

cost reduction, cost structure and pricing transparency. So this is not unique to Blgs, its actually a U-S, statewide issue. (:36)

He says depending on the findings of this demonstration project, he expects soon private insurance companies will want hospitals to bundle many prices for their clients.

PM 25 March 2014 Price bundling/Blgs hospitals JY

The two hospitals in Billings are participating in a Medicare demonstration project that seeks to improve the quality of patient care and control costs.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports, it's called price bundling.

(4:43)

Education

4 Feb 2014 MSUB Chancellor search JY

The president of Montana State University officially kicked off the search for a new chancellor for MSU-Billings.

Waded Cruzado met for the first time with the 18-member search committee today. She charged the panel to deliver to her between 3-5 candidates to replace retiring Chancellor Rolf Groseth.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(2:03)

6 Thursday 2014 MSU-B closed/shortage of gas JY

Classes and offices at Montana State University- Billings' 4-year campus will be closed today because the campus doesn't have enough natural gas to sufficiently heat its buildings.

Jackie Yamanaka explains.

(1:47)

17 Feb 2014 Code Montana – success JY

A statewide program that teaches high school students the basics of computer programming has surpassed one-thousand students in its first 5 months. Now one of the co-founders of Code Montana hopes to increase participation to five-thousand students.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(1:46)

HOST OUT: To learn more about Code Montana, go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

Wildlife

28 Jan 2014 Poultry processor JY

Soon poultry growers will be able to have their birds slaughtered and processed at a Montana facility.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports... a businesswoman in Wilsall is the first person to be issued a small enterprise exemption license from the Montana Department of Livestock.

(2:58)

HOST OUT: For more information: go to our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

Rural Issues

27 Jan 2014 Gov – Billings Library JY

The new Billings Public Library will hold its public dedication ceremony Saturday.

Governor Steve Bullock spent part of his day touring the new building with Billings City officials. Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(2:22)

HOST OUT: You can find a link to the schedule of events for the Billings Public Library grand opening at our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

29 January 2014 Lockwood – safety vote JY

A 16-year old boy who was struck – and later died - on one of Lockwood’s busy streets has become the face of a campaign to make roads in this safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Voters will receive their ballots late next week on a proposal to add pathways and street lights on some of the arterial streets in this community just east of Billings.

Jackie Yamanaka reports.

(5:22)

HOST OUT: The Friends of Dustin Freese (freeze) Campaign are planning a rally Saturday in Lockwood. It starts at 11 o’clock... behind the First Interstate Bank building on Old Hardin Road.

YPR is part of a multi-public radio station reporting project on the issue of transportation. For more information about Transportation Nation, and for pictures and links for this story, visit our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.

19 March 2014 Lockwood/Safety Levy JY

Lockwood is moving another step closer to having sidewalks, trails and street lighting installed in the community located just east of Billings.

The grass-roots effort was prompted by the death last year of a 16-year old boy who was struck while walking on one of Lockwood’s streets.

As Jackie Yamanaka reports, Yellowstone County Commissioners appointed 4 people to the advisory board for the Lockwood Safety District.

(2:26)

HOST OUT: ***YPR is part of a multi-public radio station reporting project on the issue of transportation. For more information about Transportation Nation, visit our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news.***

Native American Issues

13 Feb 2014 Tester/Chair Indian Affairs JY

Montana Senator Jon Tester is the new chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. There's been a shuffling of chairmanships with the exit of former Montana Senator Max Baucus, who had chaired the Senate Finance Committee. Baucus is now the U-S Ambassador to China.

Jackie Yamanaka talked to Tester about his goals for the Indian Affairs Committee.
(2:09)

NNN - 13 Feb 2014 Tester/Chair S. Indian Affairs JY

HOST INTRO: Montana Senator Jon Tester is the new chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee.

He assumes the gavel from Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington... who now moves to chair a different Senate Committee (Small Business and Enterprise).

(There's been a shuffling of chairmanships with the exit of former Montana Senator Max Baucus, who had chaired the Senate Finance Committee. Baucus is now the U-S Ambassador to China.)

Jackie Yamanaka talked to Tester about his goals for the Indian Affairs Committee.

The Democrat is moving quickly to reach out to tribal leaders from across the country. And he plans to start with Montana's tribes.

He says as the new Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee he plans to pick up the pace on the panel's work, including holding hearings on bills that have already passed the House.

TESTER: "And we're going to take a look at those to see if we can get those through the Senate. And then there's the big issues, health care. The Indian Health Care improvement act is in the Affordable Care Act. A lot of folks out there want to see the Affordable Health Care Act repealed we need to make sure we educate folks. There's also water issues, there's crime, housing, education." (:23)

Tester is a former teacher. He says he will seek more ways to improve tribal schools and tribal colleges. Part of that effort is to preserve tribal languages. Next week he's to visit the Crow Tribe's Head Start language immersion program in south central Montana.

For National Native News, I'm Jackie Yamanaka in Billings, Montana.

HOST OUT: You can find a link to the Billings Wolves, at our website: ypradio-dot-org-slash-news

