

Steve Bullock



Keeping Our Kids Safe

There are those events in each of our lives that profoundly impact how we think and act, that shape the lens through which we view the world.

One of those moments happened last September. Hand-in-hand, my wife Lisa and I walked Caroline, our oldest child, from our home to Central School for her first day of kindergarten.

In releasing Caroline's hand, we surrendered some of the control and influence we have over her life to a situation over which we have little control. We released that control to teachers and administrators, to parents and children we had never met, and to influences far beyond our home's door. That day, we became part of a larger community that depends on both a system of public service and individual public

servants that work every day to protect and enhance the future of every Montana child.

Having served four years in the Attorney General's office, I understand that this single elected official can meaningfully impact our lives, addressing issues ranging from protecting Montanans from scams and schemes, safeguarding our water for irrigating and recreating, and striving to provide law enforcement tools and training. In these and other areas, I hope to make a difference.

If I could only leave one mark, however, it would be in keeping kids safe – in their homes, on their playgrounds, and on that new playground, the internet. We can do more:

- Children acquire violent tendencies when exposed to violence. Greater emphasis must be placed upon family and domestic abuse, including further law enforcement training, quick prosecutorial response to abuse and neglect, and legislation enhancing penalties for abuse where children are present.
- Over 200 peace officers patrol our highways, yet only two state officers are on the information superhighway. National statistics say that 42% are bullied and 20% of kids are sexually solicited online. We must do more in terms of both education and active enforcement against those who prey on our children.
- A child bringing an unauthorized weapon to school is crying for help. We must provide tools to intervene, including allowing law enforcement to hold for psychological evaluation any student charged with possessing a weapon on school property.
- Our truancy laws can help identify problems so that no child is lost or overlooked. Law enforcement must work with schools to reduce habitual truancy, and aggressively pursue fines against parents failing to send their children to school.
- A juvenile's introduction to the criminal justice system can impact the rest of their lives. Community-based restorative justice and accountability programs have shown tangible results. Attorneys General in other states have also established meaningful mentoring programs, providing children and families caring support.

I am not so naive as to believe that one elected official can compensate for the deficiencies and inadequacies of troubled children, societal ills, and an increasingly complex society. But I am idealistic enough to believe that Montana's next Attorney General has a responsibility to do everything in his power to protect our children.



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