



Juanita Vero

Missoula County Commissioner, Montana
First elected 2020



WHAT ARE YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT OR IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS AN ELECTED LEADER?

Helping create and encourage a culture of collaboration, trust, joy and can-do.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Vast need, limited resources. Our taxing revenue is limited to property tax, which is unsustainable. It may have been appropriate 30 years ago but doesn't match our economy now. We need to figure out a way for more equitable participation, so the burden doesn't rest so heavily on property owners. This can only happen at the state level, so counties are left a bit hamstrung, having to provide services required by the state but without the necessary funding to do so.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE CONSIDERING RUNNING FOR OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Know who you are, and know your core values. Surround yourself with good people.

IS THERE A CONSERVATION-RELATED RULE, POLICY OR IDEA YOU'D LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL LEVEL?

I'm always concerned about attacks to conservation easements. I'm concerned about lack of funding for public agencies to do the work we expect of them. The pandemic has strained recreational management with increased recreational use. I'm concerned about the potential for environmental rollbacks and tarnishing of Montanans' constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.

HOW IS LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN YOUR COMMUNITY WORKING TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF SYSTEMIC RACISM AND RACIAL INEQUITY?

We are in the process of hiring an equity coordinator to help us ask better questions, to more clearly identify and understand systemic racism, and to craft more equitable solutions for everything we do.

AS A LOCAL LEADER, ARE THERE ANY LESSONS LEARNED/ADVICE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH FELLOW LOCAL OFFICIALS ON RESPONDING TO THE CURRENT PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES?

I am so very grateful for the trust and collaboration our county has with the city, the local county-city health department and county sheriff's department. That said, there is always more we can do, and I think there could have been better partnering with the business community. There are structures in place that may have inhibited that trust or that ability to have across-theboard collaboration at the very beginning.

