



ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY INTERIM COMMITTEE

69th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

Gregg Hunter
Gayle Lammers
Christopher Pope
Daniel Zolnikov

HOUSE MEMBERS

Bob Carter
Becky Edwards
Gary Parry
Kerri Seekins-Crowe
Katie Zolnikov

COMMITTEE STAFF

Griffin Burns – Lead Staff
Jacelyn Sterling - Secretary
Jameson Walker – Legal Staff

MINUTES LOG

September 09, 2025
Capital Room 102 and Zoom
Helena, Montana

Please note: This document is a Minutes Log and provides annotation of the time elapsed between the beginning of the meeting and the time at which the item was presented or discussed, a motion was made, or a vote was taken. The narrative presented here is provided only as a guide to the audio or video recording of the meeting. The official discussion, motion, or vote is available on the audio or video archive of this meeting. The Legislature does not prepare a transcript of the meeting activities. The time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio or video recording of this meeting.

Access to an electronic copy of these minutes and the audio or video recording is provided from the Legislative Branch home page at <https://leg.mt.gov>. From the home page, select the "Committees" drop down menu at the top, then select Administrative or Interim, and the appropriate committee. The written minutes log can be located by expanding the accordion menu for the date of the meeting. Links to the audio/video files can be located by selecting the Video/Audio button on the same page, then the "past/current recordings" button. From there, use the calendar to select the date of the meeting you wish to view/listen to. The written Minutes Log, along with links to the audio and video recordings, is listed by meeting date on the interim committee's web page. Each of the Exhibits is linked and can be viewed by clicking on the Exhibit of interest. All Exhibits are public information and may be printed. Please contact the Legislative Services Division at 406-444-3064 for more information.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sen. Daniel Zolnikov, Presiding Officer (R)
Rep. Becky Edwards, Vice Presiding Officer (D)
Sen. Gregg Hunter (R)
Sen. Gayle Lammers (R)
Rep. Gary Parry (R)
Sen. Christopher Pope (D)
Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe (R)
Rep. Katie Zolnikov (R)

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Rep. Bob Carter (D)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Griffin Burns, Lead Staff
Jacelyn Sterling, Secretary
Jameson Walker, Legal Staff

AGENDA ([Attachment 1](#))

VISITORS' LIST ([Attachment 2](#))

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

- 09:02:23 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM. The committee secretary took roll.
- 09:03:20 Rep. Katie Zolnikov left the meeting.

2024 UNIVERSAL SYSTEMS BENEFIT (USB) REPORTS

- 09:03:28 Griffin Burns, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 1](#)
[EXHIBIT 2](#)
[EXHIBIT 3](#)
- 09:06:48 Rep. Bob Carter joined the meeting.

Public Comment

- 09:13:33 Doug Hardy, Montana Electric Cooperatives Association

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 09:14:44 Sen. Christopher Pope
- 09:16:03 Rep. Gary Parry
- 09:16:52 Chair Daniel Zolnikov
- 09:17:05 Sen. Christopher Pope

GEO THERMAL RESEARCH UPDATE

- 09:17:45 John LaFave, Interim Director, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG)
[EXHIBIT 4](#)

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 09:38:46 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
- 09:39:02 John LaFave, MBMG
- 09:46:35 Rep. Gary Parry

Public Comment

- 09:40:11 Nick Fitzmorris, Montana Environmental Information Center
- 09:41:34 Tanner Avery, Policy Director, Frontier Institute

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 09:43:01 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
- 09:43:39 Rep. Gary Parry

09:44:15 John LaFave
 09:47:51 Sen. Christopher Pope
 09:52:00 John LaFave
 09:52:46 Rep. Bob Carter
 09:55:43 John LaFave
 09:56:52 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
 09:57:58 John LaFave
 09:58:48 Rep. Bob Carter
 09:58:55 Sen. Gayle Lammers
 09:59:12 John LaFave
 10:00:46 Vice Presiding Officer Becky Edwards
 10:01:49 John LaFave
 10:03:05 Rep. Gary Parry
 10:03:49 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
 10:04:07 Rep. Bob Carter
 10:04:21 Tanner Avery, Frontier Institute
 10:06:05 Rep. Bob Carter
 10:06:20 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
 10:07:17 Sen. Christopher Pope
 10:08:43 Rep. Gary Parry

UTILITY WILDFIRE MITIGATION OPERATIONS

10:09:25 Mark Lambrecht, Montana Electric Cooperatives Association (MECA)
 10:12:46 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov left the meeting, Vice Presiding Officer Becky Edwards assumed the position of Presiding Officer.
 10:15:52 Lindsey Booth, SMS Specialist, Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU)
[EXHIBIT 5](#)
 10:26:00 Sen. Daniel Zolnikov returned to the meeting.
 10:26:22 Griffin Burns, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

Committee Discussion / Questions

10:26:53 Sen. Christopher Pope
 10:27:40 Lindsey Booth, MDU
 10:28:14 Sen. Christopher Pope

Public Comment

10:29:36 Ron Catlett, Flathead Electric Cooperatives
 10:30:17 Alan Olsen, Montana Government Affairs Director, NorthWestern Energy

Committee Discussion / Questions

10:31:14 Sen. Daniel Zolnikov

10:32:46 Alan Olsen, NorthWestern Energy

Utility Wildfire Mitigation Operations

10:33:21 Jason Merkel, Distribution Vice President, NorthWestern Energy

[EXHIBIT 6](#)

10:42:09 Sen. Daniel Zolnikov resumed the position of Presiding Officer.

Committee Discussion / Questions

10:42:21 Rep. Gary Parry

10:43:03 Jason Merkel, NorthWestern Energy

10:45:12 Lindsey Booth

10:46:03 Rep. Gary Parry

10:46:22 Jason Merkel

10:46:53 Lindsey Booth

10:47:07 Rep. Gary Parry

10:47:43 Sen. Christopher Pope

10:50:11 Jason Merkel

(See Exhibit 6)

10:55:05 Sen. Christopher Pope

10:56:03 Jason Merkel

10:57:58 Rep. Gary Parry

10:58:33 Jason Merkel

10:59:39 Vice Presiding Officer Becky Edwards

11:00:08 Jason Merkel

11:00:20 Lindsey Booth

11:00:49 Jason Merkel

11:01:08 Rep. Bob Carter

11:01:22 Jason Merkel

11:02:02 Lindsey Booth

11:02:16 **Recessed**

11:10:57 **Reconvened**

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) Easements and Utility Permitting

11:11:30 Matt Jones, General Director, Public Affairs, BNSF

11:20:12 Cary Hutchins, Director, Corporate Real Estate, BNSF

11:26:04 Mark Lambrecht, Montana Electric Cooperatives Association

11:31:53 Bridger Malone, Broadband Montana

11:35:50 Kelly Lynch, Executive Director, Montana League of Cities and Towns (MLCT)

Public Comment - Municipality Permitting Issues

11:45:20 John Williams, Mayor, Colstrip Montana
11:49:01 NaDean Brown, Mayor, Richie Montana
11:55:12 Steve Zachmann, Mayor, Baker Montana

Public Comment

11:57:36 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

11:58:02 Rep. Bob Carter
11:58:12 Matt Jones, BNSF
12:03:15 Rep. Bob Carter
12:03:24 Matt Jones
12:04:13 Rep. Bob Carter
12:04:26 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
12:04:33 Rep. Gary Parry
12:05:07 Matt Jones
12:06:18 Sen. Christopher Pope
12:09:42 Cary Hutchins, BNSF
12:11:28 Matt Jones
12:12:33 Vice Presiding Officer Becky Edwards
12:13:57 Matt Jones
12:17:23 Vice Presiding Officer Becky Edwards
12:18:22 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
12:18:43 Matt Jones
12:18:57 Rep. Katie Zolnikov
12:21:09 Matt Jones
12:21:38 Sen. Gregg Hunter
12:22:13 Matt Jones
12:22:23 Cary Hutchins
12:22:39 Sen. Gregg Hunter
12:24:23 Matt Jones
12:24:50 Sen. Gayle Lammers
12:25:36 Kelly Lynch, MLCT
12:26:13 Sen. Gayle Lammers
12:26:59 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
12:27:25 Rep. Gary Parry
12:28:13 Matt Jones
12:28:27 Rep. Gary Parry
12:28:35 Kelly Lynch

12:28:54 Rep. Gary Parry
12:29:08 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

12:33:38 **Recessed**

13:25:49 **Reconvened**

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION UPDATE

13:26:09 Alana Lake, Executive Director, Public Service Commission (PSC)

[EXHIBIT 7](#)

13:35:05 Amanda Webster, Interim Chief Legal Counsel, PSC

[EXHIBIT 8](#)

13:38:29 Will Rosquist, Regulatory Division Administrator, PSC

[EXHIBIT 9](#)

Public Comment

13:49:34 Nick Fitzmorris, Montana Environmental Information Center

Committee Discussion / Questions

13:50:53 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

13:51:33 Alana Lake, PSC

13:51:49 Sen. Christopher Pope

13:53:56 Will Rosquist, PSC

13:55:20 Sen. Christopher Pope

14:00:36 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

14:01:13 Will Rosquist

14:02:09 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

14:02:18 Sen. Christopher Pope

14:05:26 Will Rosquist

14:06:29 Sen. Christopher Pope

14:08:25 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

INTRODUCTION TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 4

14:09:27 Chelsea Canada, National Conference of State Legislatures

Public Comment

14:25:34 Matt Elsaesser, Deputy Director, Upper Missouri Water Keeper

14:26:31 Don Cape, Coalition for Safety and Justice

14:30:18 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

14:30:30 Tanner Avery, Policy Director, Frontier Institute

Committee Discussion / Questions

14:32:32 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

INTRO TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTIONS 12/21- MONTANA TRANSMISSION PATHWAYS

14:34:38 Sharmen Andrew, Director of Operations, Berkshire Hathaway Energy (BHE)
Canada

[EXHIBIT 10](#)

Committee Discussion / Questions

14:51:02 Rep. Bob Carter
14:51:08 Sharmen Andrew, BHE
14:51:59 Rep. Gary Parry
14:52:33 Sharmen Andrew
14:54:35 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
14:54:50 Sharmen Andrew
14:57:04 Sen. Christopher Pope
14:57:59 Sharmen Andrew
14:59:03 Sen. Gregg Hunter
14:59:14 Sharmen Andrew

INTRO TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTIONS 12/21- MONTANA TRANSMISSION PATHWAYS

15:00:04 Kate Wilson, Montana Liaison, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)

15:01:43 Chris Lockman, Transmission Account Executive, BPA

[EXHIBIT 11](#)

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:13:32 Sen. Christopher Pope
15:15:49 Chris Lockman, BPA
15:16:07 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
15:16:52 Chris Lockman
15:17:53 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
15:17:58 Rep. Gary Parry
15:19:06 Chris Lockman
15:19:42 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

INTRO TO SENATE JOINT RESOLUTIONS 12/21- MONTANA TRANSMISSION PATHWAYS

- Continued

15:20:13 Mike Cashell, Vice President, NorthWestern Energy

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:40:55 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
15:41:56 Mike Cashell
15:42:45 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

15:42:53 Sen. Christopher Pope
15:45:29 Mike Cashell
15:47:25 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
15:47:26 Mike Cashell
15:48:02 Sen. Christopher Pope
15:48:11 Mike Cashell
15:48:24 Rep. Gary Parry
15:48:41 Mike Cashell
15:49:29 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov
15:52:31 Mike Cashell

Public Comment

15:53:10 Doug Hardy, Montana Electric Cooperatives

OPEN WORKSHOP / DISCUSSION

15:55:09 Griffin Burns, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 12](#)

[EXHIBIT 13](#)

[EXHIBIT 14](#)

15:58:59 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

Motion

15:56:47 Rep. Katie Zolnikov moved to adopt the committee workplan for the 2025-26 interim.

Vote

15:57:30 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

Motion

15:59:26 Rep. Gary Parry moved to sign a letter of support to Bonneville Power Administration and send it.

Vote

15:59:39 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

16:00:21 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:00:31 Griffin Burns

16:00:55 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:02:33 Sen. Gayle Lammers

16:02:43 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:03:13 Sen. Gregg Hunter

16:03:26 Rep. Gary Parry

16:04:13 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

Motion

16:05:06 Rep. Gary Pary moved to begin drafting language for an energy authority bill.

Vote

16:07:41 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

16:05:22 Griffin Burns

16:05:44 Sen. Christopher Pope

16:06:07 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:06:20 Rep. Gary Parry

16:07:14 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

Motion

16:07:54 Sen. Gayle Lammers moved to begin drafting language for a Crypto Reserve Bill.

Vote

16:09:02 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

16:08:17 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:08:38 Rep. Bob Carter

Motion

16:09:20 Rep. Bob Carter moved to look at Public Service Commission and begin committee discussion regarding issues.

Vote

16:13:00 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

16:10:13 Rep. Gary Parry

16:10:31 Rep. Bob Carter

16:11:05 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:11:33 Rep. Bob Carter

16:12:01 Griffin Burns

16:12:27 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

16:12:50 Rep. Gary Parry

16:13:39 Presiding Officer Daniel Zolnikov

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY MATTER WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF ETIC

16:13:42 None

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 16:14:08