

Montana's Crucial Senate Primary: Will They Nominate a True Conservative to Challenge Tester?

In a race that could well decide the future control of the U.S. Senate, GOP voters must choose between a heavily-backed newcomer and a firebrand fighter of the DC establishment

by Roger Koopman

It's exactly the same – in fruit picking and in politics.

The biggest, shiniest apples almost always have the most worms. The most-slick, money-backed, well-heeled candidates almost always have the most to hide, once you remove their patina of platitudes and polish. Later, when the politician has been elected and you've taken a good bite of the apple, voters start choking on the worms and asking themselves, "How did that happen???"

Conservatives who think they are electing reliable standard-bearers for the cause of liberty and limited government, often can't figure out why they end up voting so badly.

The truth is, Republican primary voters – impressed by tough-guy images and men in medal-adorned uniforms – have never been very good fruit inspectors. Time and again, they find themselves attracted to the professionally-polished image, and later asking, "How did that happen?"

How did our ruggedly handsome hero become such a wormy apple once in office?

In Montana's critically important U.S. Senate Republican primary, that determines who will face off against vulnerable Democratic incumbent Jon Tester, things are heating up, following the entry of tax-enriched mogul Timothy Sheehy into the race.

Sheehy is the hand-picked golden boy of the state GOP's Daines-Zinke moderate wing.

Himself a Montana transplant, Sheehy is a decorated Navy Seal and super-rich federal contractor. The perfectly engineered candidate to challenge Jon Tester – or so the Washington D.C. GOP Establishment believes.

Yet when it comes to conservative Republican credentials, Sheehy's no Red Delicious apple. He's more of a cross between a striped Wealthy and a Yellow Transparent, and the worm holes are all too evident.

We'll take a look at some of these worms, but first let's answer this overriding question:

On what key factors should GOP voters base their evaluation of Montana's primary candidates, all of whom will claim to be – and sound like – principled, Constitutional, small government conservatives?

Two things: *history and integrity.*

History may be summed up in the familiar axiom *actions speak louder than words.* Judge a candidate not by what he says about himself, but what he has actually done for the conservative cause before deciding to run. What is his actual political and public policy-related record?

Joe Candidate can "say" anything he wants, and the more money he has, the more he can say it. But does he have a proven track record of conservative involvement?

What has he read? What has he written?

What candidates or causes has he backed?

Has he been a conservative activist? If not, why not?

A candidate's integrity, character and moral conscience can be established by looking at both the past and the present, but are especially evident in the way a candidate runs his campaign.

As FEE founder Leonard Read once observed, "*A man rises no higher in office than he stood while getting there.*"

A candidate who compromises his honesty and integrity just once, will become a congressman who does so a thousand times, whenever the chips are down. Whenever he's truly tested.

Those kinds of "Republicans," once in office, become more ambitious, more cynical, more prideful and more compromising with each passing day – morphing into the problem, not the solution.

They are the "how did that happens," the counterfeit conservatives who will never buck the establishment nor make a real difference in a corrupt and broken system.

They become quite comfortable members in good standing of the Republican Club, and that all but assures that they will never be change agents, only agents for the status quo.

Certainly, Tim Sheehy's handlers have groomed him well, and he is quick with the popular one-liners on the hot button GOP issues.

But his history paints a shocking and frightening picture of a man who is not only devoid of conservative activism, but who has embraced radical leftist causes and gobbled up corporate welfare on his way to great wealth at taxpayer expense.

No philosophical conservative would do this.

Examples:

- 1. His Bridger Aerospace company promoted itself to the far-left Woke community as a “fundamentally-driven [ESG business](#),” thus securing a \$160 million ESG industrial development bond – one of the largest ESG-accredited “sustainability” bonds ever.** After becoming a candidate, Sheehy then scrubbed all ESG references from his website. Yet even now, Sheehy continues to be heavily invested in certain climate alarmism-based enterprises, such as the sustainability service Cloverly, a firm that helps companies monitor their “planet-threatening” carbon (CO2) output.
- 2. Until Sheehy announced for the senate, his company also boldly represented itself as “fighting on the front lines of [climate change](#)” and as attacking “CO2 emissions to combat climate change.”** This, too, has disappeared from his Bridger website. As late as August of 2022, Sheehy was still urging “international cooperation” in fighting climate change, and described Bridger’s “fundamental business principles of environmental and social sustainability” and the ability “to effectively combat today’s changing climate.” Now candidate Sheehy is stating on Fox News that “the cleanest form of energy known to man is American fossil fuels.”
- 3. While earning \$5 million a year in salary and bonuses from a company, 96% of whose revenues are derived from government contracts, Sheehy aggressively fattened his bank account further through direct taxpayer subsidies.** Most recently, this included a \$774,300 payroll “forgivable federal loan” (swamp-speak for subsidy.) By sheer “coincidence,” he then turned around and personally donated \$700,000 to his senate campaign. Sheehy then feasted at the corporate welfare trough a second time, taking a \$221,000 [federal SBA subsidy](#) so taxpayers could have the privilege of underwriting the training of his employees. Imagine a man with a probable net worth of over \$200 million, having a clear conscience while plundering the average taxpayer with socialistic schemes that his own business should be paying for. **The net effect: tax dollars diverted to enhance his bottom line.**
- 4. In his TV spots, Sheehy strikes quite the pose, donning his cowboy hat while prominently planted in the saddle of a sturdy quarter horse.** John Wayne, eat your heart out! Indeed, with his political donations, Sheehy likes to describe himself as “rancher” or “cowboy.” **Yet no serious rancher would have somehow “forgotten” to register his [livestock](#) with the Department of Revenue as state law requires.** Still, after four years of ownership, Sheehy has yet to report as much as one skinny chicken. His estimated unpaid tax bill in now is the tens of thousands.

One can only guess how much is yet to be uncovered about his self-aggrandizing business practices. Critics have already latched on to his Montana state tax avoidance by incorporating on the east coast, and his recent merger with Jack Creek Investment, a “blank check” corporation operating out of the Cayman Islands, a tax haven for the wealthy.

No one alleges that these business decisions are illegal, but for a candidate who would likely enter the Senate as the wealthiest member of Congress, there is something distinctly selfish and unseemly about his entrepreneurial philosophy – something that is likely to stick in the craw of the average Montana voter.

Add to this, the lingering questions about the sources of his sudden post-military [largesse](#) and the lewd photos and [erotica](#) connected to his early years on Facebook.

Then too, Bridger Aerospace’s Diversity and Inclusion statement in its 2023 FSC filing is not likely to warm the cockles of conservatives’ hearts.

Sheehy appears to be the perfect Play-Doh in the hands of the big business, country club establishment – faux Republicans who value money, prestige and power over courage, conviction and principle.

Men whose goal is control, not freedom. What Montanans – enamored by his handsome “warrior” TV image -- appear to be missing is the amount of baggage he would tote into a general election contest with Jon Tester.

Those who still think Sheehy would be the “more effective” candidate to defeat the far-left Tester had better think twice. The Democrats will have a field day exposing his private breaches of the public trust.

Combined with this are the many reports of Sheehy’s below-the-belt campaign tactics, said to be among the most reprehensible in recent Montana memory.

With the alleged assistance of highly-placed Republican office holders (it’s not hard to fill in the blanks), a scorched earth blitz is now underway, which aims at legislators, donors and vendors, a variety of intimidating messages and veiled threats of retaliation.

The real target is Montana’s recognized conservative North Star and liberty leader: Congressman Matt Rosendale. These muggings of Rosendale supporters may indeed speak more loudly than anything, about the decency and honesty of candidate Tim Sheehy.

Rosendale has yet to enter the senate race, but most observers believe his announcement is imminent.

Knowing Matt, I’m sure he remains unphased by all of the low-level assaults against him. Matt will simply rise above them and take the high road into office, like he always does.

Let's not forget that it was Matt Rosendale, together with a mere 7 other freedom-minded members, whose unshakable courage turned around the leadership of the entire U.S. House of Representatives, installing a stellar new Speaker and with him, the return of an open and transparent appropriations process, with individual spending bills, open debate and full opportunity for amendments. Imagine that?

Only principle-driven change agents like Matt Rosendale will accomplish that kind of swamp-draining progress.

No, Matt has no reason to be concerned about the antics – or the money – of Tim Sheehy. At the end of the day, wormy apples have very little value in the political marketplace.

Roger Koopman of Bozeman is the president of Montana Conservative Alliance. He was a two-term Montana state legislator, two-term Montana Public Service Commissioner and 37-year small businessman. He and his wife Ann raised four children, all of whom were home educated. Koopman also served on the congressional staffs of Steve Symms (R-ID) and Ron Paul (R-TX), and was a field representative for the National Rifle Association.

