

COREY STAPLETON  
SECRETARY OF STATE



September 14, 2017

STATE OF MONTANA

Senator Malek,

Thank you for your letter and invitation to provide "information" in direct response to an Associated Press (AP) article citing 360 cases of voter fraud in Montana. The article followed the July 20<sup>th</sup> SAVA meeting.

Neither in the SAVA committee, nor to the AP, did I make any allegations of 360 cases of voter fraud. But your letter to me, however, did incorrectly cite me in that AP story as saying there *were* 360 cases of voter fraud in Montana. I made no such statement. Furthermore, your letter was then used by Lee newspapers to continue the incorrect accusation of widespread voter fraud.

If it was not your intent to convey that misstatement, I would ask that you correct the public record to the extent that you can. The AP reporter who wrote that article is no longer employed there. Additionally, I have spoken to Lee newspaper editors and let them know of their incorrect story. The problem is, of course, it becomes difficult for media to walk back stories of widespread voter fraud, once they've become the foundation of public conversation. I would encourage you, with respect to voter fraud, not to believe everything you see in the newspapers or read on the internet.

So the premise of your invitation is based upon incorrect information. I can, however, update you on related issues from the May 25<sup>th</sup> special election.

The Elections Administrators (Clerks) and our office is currently working on a joint project, or Survey, analyzing the data from the 1,833 ballots that were cast but did not count in the special election. We are following a six-step process, currently on the third step of 'analyzing data', and are scheduled to be completed by November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I look forward to sharing our findings with SAVA.

As you may know, there was considerably higher occurrences of late ballots (596), ballots without signatures (831), and ballots with illegal or 'mismatched' signatures (363), than occurred just 7 months prior in the November general election. I am concerned about this. I think the Clerks are too, and we are on a trajectory of greatly reducing the number of uncounted ballots in future elections. That's our shared goal. But first we need to understand why so many people are signing other voter's ballots. I don't need to tell you that it's against the law to sign other's ballots, vote other's ballots, open other's mail, or vote twice in the same election. Yet we saw increased occurrences in the special election.

Since the special election, a handful of cases of voter misconduct have been brought to my attention, including two cases of voter fraud. There is currently an active investigation in Butte-Silver Bow County by the Sheriff's department, regarding three separate cases of voter misconduct. I anticipate that we may find additional cases of interest as the Clerks and our Office work through the 363 ballots cast with signatures that did not match the voter's. We will know more by year's end. Thanks for your interest!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corey Stapleton".