

# Governor Brian Schweitzer

Interview by Brian Schott 57

**Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer** wears jeans, a Bolin tie, and takes his dog Jag with him nearly everywhere he goes. Since winning the gubernatorial election in November 2004 (as a Democrat bucking trends by running with a Republican), Schweitzer has made a name for himself nationally—all while complaining he has to wash the “stink” off each time he leaves D.C..

**The mountains energize me.** When you get around one bar of cell service, that's when I hit my full stride. To throw a line in—whether you catch something or not, it doesn't matter. Well, it does matter. You want to catch something.

**I do my best work in the pickup with my dog next to me.**

**Everyone in Montana wears jeans. Why the hell would I wear anything else?** That's just a damn fool who would care that I wear jeans. I mean, unless you're going to a damn funeral.

**Wolves are a natural part of the habitat, the food chain, the ecology of Montana.** Montana is a healthier place because we have wolves. Now there is a fair bit of debate about that. Because wolves not only tend to take elk calves and deer calves, but they actually decrease the conception rate. We're seeing the conception rate go down. And it's just because these females are nervous. They are getting moved around. And so there's probably been a little bit of a hit on the elk. But it's interesting—because the cattlemen, the stock growers, of which I am one—they don't want to have wolves around because they don't want the wolves eating their calves. But the same stock growers have also been complaining that we have too many elk. Our management objective is to have 150,000 head of elk, and we have almost 180,000—so we've got to decrease the numbers. Wolves are putting a population check on elk. You'd think that the stock growers would say that's good, but they don't. They say it's bad because they don't want any wolves.

**If there are wolves in among the cattle, shoot them. Simple as that.**

**I rode around near Times Square** in the back of a truck. We had huckleberry jelly, some jerky, and some other products that are distinctly Montanan—and we just gave them away to people. People in New York are wary if you're trying to give them something.

**I am a hunter.** I've gotten to the point where I can carry a rifle a long time, and I can look in a scope, see a critter, and say—you know, I could have had you, but not today. When I was younger it was important to me to have one in the back of the pickup, but I don't need to anymore. If it's right







and he has a big rack and lived a long time, maybe I'll take him. And maybe I won't. When you start to get a little bit of gray hair, you remember it only takes a split second to pull the trigger, and then out comes the knife and the saw—and it's work for the next three hours.

**When I was elected Governor, I said look—we're going to develop our wind energy.** I grew up in wind country. That's why I have one leg shorter than the other, from leaning into the wind. Right away, first session, we got the renewable energy portfolio standards passed. And of course people said, come on—wind energy? We've got coal and hydroelectricity and natural gas and oil. Wind power's for hippies! Well, we passed it anyway, and more than a billion dollars and thousands of jobs have been created.

**Montana is an energy state.** We've increased our oil and gas production at the fastest rate in the history of the state. Ditto with coal. Those are big job creators. And we've learned a lot. We don't mine coal the way the copper kings mined copper or the way the old glory holes were mining gold. Most of the coal is open pit, which means that they post a bond—and that bond is for tens of millions of dollars, and there is a reclamation plan. I'm a soil scientist. I have a master's degree in soil science. Once it's reclaimed, it looks like it was before it was mined. They will do the right thing because the financial consequences of doing the wrong thing are immense.

**Now, obviously, coal is a large producer of CO<sub>2</sub>.** But all of our hydrocarbons are. We are in the hydrocarbon era. We'll be exiting that in probably 40, 50 years. And we'll be moving onto our next sources of energy. I'm not sure we know what they are yet. Solar may have a role. Wind may have a role.

**In 1912, Montana was owned by the copper kings.** We stood up and said we're not going to allow corporations to own Montana anymore. So we passed the anti-corruption act. And it worked for 100 years. We had clean elections. And now the U.S. Supreme Court [in last summer's so called "corporate personhood" case] says, "Now, silly you, Montana. You've been breaking the law for 100 years...a little corruption is good." How much do you think foreign corporations

will spend to make sure they have a Congress and a President that is friendly to them? That's the door the Supreme Court opened.

**I think politics, for the most part, is boring.** Regular people with regular jobs and regular families in regular houses? When they get the newspaper, and the headline is about how this politician is saying something about this issue—they don't even read the first paragraph.

**I try to make politics real.** I speak in regular terms. I use the words that Montanans use. In the last legislative session I vetoed some 79 bills. It was theatre of the absurd here. These crazy bills land on my desk! Well, I was sworn to uphold the constitution.

**I vetoed those bills on the steps of the Capitol with a branding iron so the people of Montana knew how crazy—batcrap crazy—the last legislative session was.** I had seasoned, well-respected people—legislators—come to me, quietly, and say, "Now, Governor, I voted for that bill, but you will veto it, won't you?" And I'd say, "Well, yeah, I'll veto it, but why'd you vote for it?"... "Oh hell, because if I didn't vote for it then the party leadership would be mad at me and I just knew you'd do the right thing." It's kind of a lonely place around here when you are asking just one branch of government to be sane.

**The report card is in.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, during the last six years, Montana has increased its adult population with a college degree at the fastest rate in the country. So the investments that we've made in education are paying off.

**The preamble to the Montana constitution talks about the quiet beauty and the dignity of the people.** We have a constitution that respects the individual right to privacy. We have a constitution—they were so ahead of their time—that recognizes how important it is to protect Montana's grandeur. Her rivers. Her mountains. Her wildlife.

**In Montana you don't have to be like all the other sheeple.** If you are the nail that sticks out on the deck, that's a good thing. In other places, they're not comfortable until all the nails are pounded right back into the deck.