

Ex-Lt. Gov. Bohlinger officially enters race for Senate



14 HOURS AGO • BY CHARLES S. JOHNSON IR STATE BUREAU

Former Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger said Wednesday he decided to run for the U.S. Senate after the receiving considerable support and encouragement from Montanans the past four months.

Bohlinger, 77, a Democrat from Helena, also said he was motivated to enter in the race after the 16-day partial government shutdown this fall.

“We need to challenge the tea party representatives who like the Taliban shut our country down,” Bohlinger told reporters, comparing it to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and the terrorists’ actions on Sept. 11, 2001.

Bohlinger did not mention Rep. Steve Daines, R-Mont., by name, but Daines, who announced his candidacy for the Senate on Wednesday, voted with the House Republican majority for the shutdown. Daines later voted to end it.

He spilled the beans on his announcement at a local Democratic Party dinner Tuesday night, when someone asked him about his plans. Bohlinger elaborated with reporters on Wednesday in front of a health club where he works out regularly.

Bohlinger, then a Republican who owned a women’s apparel shop in Billings, was elected to three terms in the Montana House and elected to two terms in the state Senate.

Brian Schweitzer, a Democrat, tapped Bohlinger to be his running mate as lieutenant governor, and the bipartisan team won in 2004 and 2008.

“We need to elect someone to the U.S. Senate who can speak to Montana veterans,” Bohlinger, a Marine veteran, said. “We need some to speak to the need of building the middle class.”

He also endorsed overhauling the federal tax system and putting Montanans to work.

Bohlinger called for bringing U.S. troops back from the Middle East and said the United States can no longer be the world’s policeman.

He said Montanans need to talk about health care, although he didn’t offer any specifics.

If elected, Bohlinger said he would vote to change the Senate rules so it doesn’t take 60 votes of the 100 senators to pass anything.

Bohlinger criticized the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee for backing Lt. Gov. John Walsh, another Democrat, for the Senate. On Wednesday, Sen. Jon Tester, also a Democrat, endorsed Walsh.

“I really feel it’s inappropriate for the Democratic Party to choose sides in a Democratic primary,” Bohlinger said.

He called Walsh “a wonderful man” and someone he enormously respects.

However, Bohlinger contrasted the two Democrats’ backgrounds, saying, “I’ve had a seat at the table when public policy is formulated.”

In response, Walsh’s campaign manager, Michelle Mayorga, said, “We look forward to an honest debate among all candidates about the ideas they have for Montana’s future. John Walsh brings to the table courage, selfless service and a commitment to putting his responsibilities as a public servant before party ideals.”

Bohlinger had said earlier this year he would limit himself to one six-year term if he wins the Senate seat. Now he said he’d leave it up to the voters to decide how long he should serve.

He called the role of money in politics unfortunate, but said he would have to raise as much as he can to win. Following the policy of the Schweitzer-Bohlinger campaigns, Bohlinger said he won’t accept any money from special-interest political action committees.

Brief biography

Name: John Bohlinger

Office sought: U.S. Senate.

Office salary: \$174,000 a year.

Political party: Democratic.

Age: 77.

Birth date and place: Bozeman, April 21, 1936.

Home: Helena.

Occupation: “Between things.”

Family: Wife, Karen, and six children.

Education: Graduated from Billings Senior High School, 1955, and received a bachelor’s degree in business and studied humanities at the University of Montana, 1961.

Past employment: Lieutenant governor, 2005-2013; worked in and owned Aileen’s, the family’s women’s apparel store in Billings, 1961-1992.

Military: Enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve as a senior in high school and was called to active duty between his sophomore and junior years at college. He spent six years on active duty and in the reserve.

Political experience: Elected to serve in the state House of Representatives as a Republican from Billings in 1992, 1994 and 1996 and in the Senate in 1998 and 2002.

Website: www.bohlingerforsenate.com (under development).