



Recommendation of  
Mae Nan Ellingson for  
Honorary Doctorate

Fall 2023

May 4, 2023

President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear President Bodnar,

It is with great honor that I submit Mae Nan Ellingson for an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Montana. A titan of Montana finance, law, and government, she is deserving of this recognition.

Mae Nan Ellingson is a two-time graduate of the University of Montana and was the youngest delegate to the 1972 Constitutional Convention, one of 19 women delegates out of the 100 to serve.

She is credited with co-authoring the preamble to the Constitution, which states, “We the people of Montana grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains, and desiring to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations do ordain and establish this constitution.”

During the convention, she also led proposals for the state’s bill of rights, which includes equal rights for women and the right of privacy for every Montanan. While at the convention, Mae Nan Ellingson also supported critical provisions to expand the public access to a more open state government and spearheaded Montana’s “clean and healthful” environmental constitutional provision that has protected our citizens’ access to clean air and water for the past 50 years.

After graduating from the UM School of Law, Mae Nan Ellingson launched a successful legal career that included working as bond counsel for Dorsey & Whitney in Missoula, MT. Over the nearly three decades, there was rarely a major local government financing project that Mae Nan Ellingson did not contribute towards. During her time at Dorsey & Whitney, she helped lead the charge to form the Montana Municipal Insurance Authority, establish tax increment financing, and create other tools that Montana’s municipal governments can do to invest in their communities.

For five decades, Mae Nan Ellingson has been at the center of some of the most impactful initiatives that have benefited our state. It is not a stretch to note that every Montanan has

benefitted from the hard work of Mae Nan Ellingson. Her legacy will be felt for as long as Montanans call the Last Best Place “home.”

Because of her work as a delegate to the historic 1972 Constitutional Convention and her continued advocacy on behalf of public investment to improve the quality of life for Montanans, the University of Montana Alumni Association proudly endorses Mae Nan Ellingson for an Honorary Doctorate at the Fall 2023 Commencement ceremony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "LeAnn Layton".

LeAnn Layton  
Director of Alumni Relations

Seth Bodnar, President  
University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula, Montana 59812

October 21, 2022

Re: Nomination of Mae Nan Ellingson for an Honorary Doctorate Degree

Dear President Bodnar:

Please accept this letter of reference in support of the nomination of Mae Nan Ellingson to receive an Honorary Doctorate Degree from the University of Montana. I am deeply honored to do so.

I have known Mae Nan for over forty years in my capacity as a State Senator, lawyer, Director of Government and Corporate Relations for the Washington Companies and Executive Director of the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation. During my legislative career from 1980 to 2002, Mae Nan provided expert legal, financial and tax advice to various legislative committees on issues associated with school districts, special improvement districts, as well as projects involving local and state government. In addition, Mae Nan was the most respected expert in the field of public bonding and her opinions were relied on by public officials at all levels of government. Given Mae Nan's experience as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, she was one of a hand-full of delegates whose opinions were sought out to provide the historical context on Montana's unique and far-reaching Declaration of Rights as well as the language contained in all fourteen Articles of the new Constitution.

Mae Nan is possessed with an amazing intellect, strong work ethic and proven ability to work in a team environment so that all voices are heard. Largely because of these and many other attributes, Mae Nan was named one of the Convention's "Ten Outstanding Constitutional Convention Delegates." Mae Nan was 24 at the time and one of only 19 women out of 100 delegates.

Over the past year, I have had the honor of working closely with Mae Nan in her position as chair of the committee organizing events to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of Montana's 1972 Constitution. The credibility that Mae Nan brought to our committee efforts to showcase the exemplary and far-sighted work of the 100 delegates was evident from the beginning of our work. Her reputation for professionalism, encyclopedic knowledge of the background behind virtually every provision of the 1972 Constitution, laser-focused philosophy that the committee showcase the bipartisan work of the delegates and, more importantly, her insistence that the committee take extraordinary steps to reach Montanans in every corner of the state, were the reasons why the committee's work was so impactful.

Lastly, given the deep impact Mae Nan Ellingson has had in Montana as the youngest elected delegate to the 1972 Constitutional Convention, her decades of tireless work as an attorney with Dorsey & Whitney to provide professional legal and tax advice to public officials at the state and local level, and her dedication to public service that is most recently exemplified by her role as chair of the Organizing Committee to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1972 Montana Constitution, I would strongly support honoring Mae Nan Ellingson by awarding her an Honorary Doctorate Degree at the University of Montana.

Should you wish to discuss her nomination further, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly. I would be happy to provide additional information reinforcing my nomination of Mae Nan Ellingson to receive an Honorary Doctorate Degree at the University of Montana.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Halligan", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Halligan

Karen S. Townsend  
1450 Pattee Canyon Road  
Missoula, Montana, 59803  
October 22, 2022

Seth Bodnar,  
President University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana 59812

Re: Mae Nan Ellingson

Dear President Bodnar:

It is my pleasure and honor to write in support of the University's proposal to award Mae Nan an honorary doctorate degree. Her contributions to Missoula and the State of Montana make her a worthy candidate for such an honor.

Mae Nan grew up in Mineral Wells, Texas and worked in her family's drive-in restaurant. It was while working there that she met a military helicopter pilot who stole her heart and brought her to his home in Montana, arriving in 1967. Once here, she began almost immediately on a path of service to her adopted home. She graduated with honors in Political Science from the University of Montana, and went on to graduate school where she was encouraged by her professor, Ellis Waldron, to run for the Constitutional Convention set to kickoff in January of 1972. By that time, Mae Nan was a young widow as her husband had been killed in a helicopter crash in Alaska.

Mae Nan was elected as the youngest Constitutional Convention delegate, but her youth did not limit her contributions. She led proposals for the Bill of Rights, and together with Missoula Delegate Bob Campbell drafted the beautiful and inspiring preamble to the Constitution:

We the people of Montana grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains and desiring to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations do ordain and establish this constitution.

Mae Nan was named one of the ten outstanding Constitutional Convention Delegates. One of her fellow delegates encouraged her to go to law school, but her admission had to be postponed for a year because her mother had died and she needed to raise her younger sister and brother. She spent that school year, 1972-1973, teaching at Hellgate High School while living in a trailer and serving as substitute mother for her sister and brother.

I met Mae Nan in the fall of 1973 when we joined a group of nine women in the entering law school class of seventy-five students. Mae Nan had an outstanding career at the law school. She graduated with honors, participated in Moot Court and was a member of the Law Review. She was also instrumental in the founding of the Women's Law Caucus and the intramural team, the Mistrials.

After graduation, she began work for the Missoula City Attorney's Office where she specialized on landmark projects including Missoula's Open Space Bonds that protected Mount Sentinel. The international law firm Dorsey and Whitney lured her away from the City Attorney's Office in 1983 where she specialized as their bond counsel for projects across Montana--- schools, sewer systems, libraries, swimming pools. She helped form the Montana Municipal Insurance Authority, a pooled insurance group for cities. She shaped Montana's tax increment law and set up the Intercap Program that allowed local governments to borrow money from the State at a low interest rate.


Mae Nan has frequently taught at conferences sponsored by Montana's League of Cities and Towns, the Montana Association of Counties, Rural Water Users Association, DNRC, the Water and Sewer Agencies Coordination Team, and the National Association of Bond Lawyers. She was recognized with an outstanding service award by the Montana Rural Water Users Association in 2002. She was elected a Fellow in the American College of Bond Counsel. Mae Nan has been recognized as a Super Lawyer in the Rocky Mountain West, and one of America's Leading Business Lawyers by Chambers USA (Rank 1), and is listed in Best Lawyers in America. She has served on the University of Montana's Law School's Board of Visitors. Upon her retirement from the active practice of law, she was widely praised as having had a positive impact on hundreds of projects around Montana.

Mae Nan is also known for her philanthropy and service on non-profit boards. She serves on the boards of the Missoula Art Museum, Five Valleys Land Trust and many others. Most recently she headed the capital campaign for Missoula's new library, and was instrumental in securing the funds that allowed the creation of what was recently recognized as being the most outstanding new library in the world.

Mae Nan has long been a significant supporter of the University of Montana School of Law, most recently participating in the symposium sponsored by the Law Review commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1972 Constitution.

On a personal note, Mae Nan has been one of my closest friends since our meeting in 1973. We celebrated successes, birthdays, weddings, holidays, and helped each other when setbacks arose. She was a key advisor when I decided to run for District Court Judge. She is truly one of the treasure state treasures. I think she is well deserving of this high honor.

Sincerely,



Karen S. Townsend,  
District Court Judge, Ret.



President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana

Re: Nomination of Mae Nan Ellingson for an Honorary Doctorate

Greetings:

In this year when our Montana Constitution reached its fiftieth birthday, and came under more assaults than any previous year, the youngest delegate from 1972, Mae Nan Ellingson, organized a stunning celebration at Montana's Capitol, including high quality speakers addressing its far-reaching uniqueness, and in-depth, scholarly discussions of most Articles.

Those of us involved in politics of the early 1970s were jolted into awareness when the delegates, including its youngest delegate - for certain, one of the most studious and well-spoken - arrived at the Capitol. Personally, I was riveted. They accomplished their mission in some 54 days, and then, most remarkable of all, went out across Montana with their enthusiasm and knowledge and convinced the public to adopt it.

I served in the legislature before and after the convention, with the honorable task of implementing many of its provisions. Among the biggest incentives was to do our best with provisions for which Mae Nan was particularly responsible - generally referred to as "clean and healthful". This swept us into a decade of visionary policy now called "the glory days".

Forty-nine years later I collected twenty stories from the '70s, and edited and compiled them into the 2021 Montana Law Review entitled "TO MAKE A BETTER PLACE." Mae Nan's story came in last. I was ready to walk to Missoula and pry it out of her, if necessary. As I said to her, "There cannot be an accurate account of the activism and commitment of the '70s without your story." It arrived in three parts, and I understood why it needed the extra time - it is really an autobiography. It is a must-read, explaining how Mae Nan not only found her mission, but her path. After the Convention she went on to the UM law school and a remarkable career.

What her story portrays are all the obstacles and challenges she overcame, starting with a rocky childhood, poverty, and raising a younger sibling. How, at age 22, she cultivated her interest in a state constitution, ran a campaign, and served as a delegate with such dignity, is testament to her superb mind and internal, enduring strength.

Mae Nan is so suited for this honor, having found her intellectual anchor at the University of Montana with the encouragement and support of UM faculty.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dorothy Bradley, Clyde Park, MT Former 16 year State Representative

**JAMES P. MOLLOY**  
**10 Carriage Lane**  
**Helena, MT 59601**

October 20, 2022

President Seth Bodnar  
University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula, MT 59812

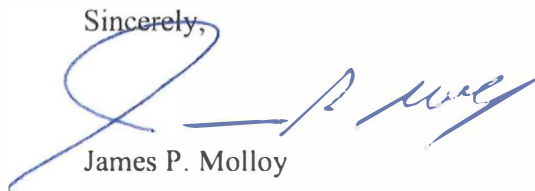
Dear President Bodnar:

I submit this letter to endorse the nomination of Mae Nan Ellingson to receive an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Montana. Mae Nan (formerly known as Mae Nan Robinson) was the youngest person to serve as a Delegate to the 1972 Montana Constitutional Convention. She was actively involved in supporting the inclusion of Article X in the Constitution. Based on the language in Article X, Section (1), we were able to prevail in lawsuits seeking to compel the Montana Legislature to adequately fund public schools. In doing so, we were also able to obtain orders requiring the State of Montana to enact legislation to implement the obligation of the State to recognize the “distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians. . . .” As a delegate, Mae Nan was also involved in helping to draft and support other provisions that were ultimately included in Montana’s Constitution.

Mae Nan is a person of great character, integrity and intelligence. She had a very successful career as an attorney with Dorsey & Whitney. Throughout her life, she has dedicated herself to service of others. I was privileged to get to know Mae Nan, and I had the opportunity to work with her on the Main Street Montana Project when I served in the Governor’s Office. Based on an invitation from Mae Nan, I was also honored to have the opportunity to participate in the Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Montana Constitutional Convention.

In sum, I believe Mae Nan Ellingson is highly deserving of an Honorary Doctorate. I enthusiastically support her nomination.

Sincerely,



James P. Molloy