



MEDIA RELEASE

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IMAGE: MCC Alum Jess Peterson

Peterson Named as 2026 Distinguished Alumni recipient

MILES CITY, MONTANA: Miles Community College (MCC) is pleased to announce that Jess Peterson has been named the 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient.

Peterson will be recognized during MCC's Commencement Ceremony on Saturday, May 2, 2026, in the MCC Centra Gym, where he will also serve as the commencement speaker.

The Distinguished Alumni Award honors former students who have demonstrated exceptional professional achievement, leadership, and a commitment to service since their time at Miles Community College.

“Jess represents the very best of MCC alumni,” said MCC President Slinger. “His leadership in agriculture, public policy, and community engagement reflects the impact our graduates can have across Montana and beyond.”

Peterson is a fifth-generation Montana rancher and a graduate of Miles Community College, where he earned an Associate of Arts degree in 2002. While at MCC, he was valedictorian, a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and served in student leadership roles, including Student Senate and as captain of the basketball team.

Following his time at MCC, Peterson earned a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Communication from Gonzaga University.

Peterson is the founder and president of Western Skies Strategies, a public policy, executive management, and strategic communications firm established in 2007. Through his work, he has assisted a wide range of clients—including ranchers, nonprofit organizations, land managers, and energy and telecommunications companies—in navigating local, state, and federal policy processes.

In addition to leading Western Skies Strategies, Peterson serves as Executive Director of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, where he has overseen strategic planning, financial operations, and regional engagement efforts. His leadership contributed to the selection of a proposed rail line as the only new long-distance passenger rail route in the United States.

He also serves as a Senior Policy Advisor for the United States Cattlemen’s Association, acting as a liaison to federal agencies and elected officials, and contributing to national policy development affecting the livestock industry.

Alongside his professional work, Peterson remains deeply connected to his agricultural roots. He operates J2 Bar Land & Livestock, a family ranching operation headquartered near Hysham, Montana, with additional grazing operations near Livingston. The ranch is supported by multiple generations of his family, continuing a long-standing legacy in Montana agriculture.

Peterson has also demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership and service. He currently serves on the Billings Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and the Producer Partnership Board and previously chaired the Montana Land Reliance Future Montana Committee.

His contributions have earned numerous recognitions, including honors as one of the livestock industry’s emerging leaders and a recipient of the Billings Chamber of Commerce Agriculture Excellence Award.

Peterson will be formally honored at MCC’s commencement ceremony, joining a distinguished group of alumni recognized for their professional success, leadership, and lasting impact.

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