



House endorses making 'Montana Lullaby' official lullaby

By **CHARLES S. JOHNSON**
Gazette State Bureau

HELENA - With little debate, the House on Monday endorsed a bill designating "Montana Lullaby" as the official state lullaby.



Rep. Wayne Stahl

With Ken Overcast of Chinook, the man who wrote the lyrics and sings the lullaby, watching from the gallery, House Bill 594 won preliminary approval, 77-23. The measure will move to the Senate if it gains a final House approval.

The bill sponsor, Rep. Wayne Stahl, R-Saco, called his four-line measure "the shortest bill you're probably going to see."

Rep. Julie French, D-Scobey, needled fellow Hi-Line resident Stahl, saying: "I can't remember what the song sounds like. Could you sing it for us?"

"I'm afraid that would kill the bill," Stahl replied.

As the vote was taken, most representatives hit their red lights to signal a no vote, but then most changed to green before the votes were tallied.

Thirty-nine Democrats, 37 Republicans and one Constitution Party member backed the state lullaby, while 13 Republicans and 10 Democrats voted against it.

Afterward, Overcast told reporters that the bill, pushed by a Billings country radio DJ and a director of the Yellowstone County Museum, "was almost a dream" to him.

"It's such an honor to be considered," even if the bill goes down, he said.

Overcast said he had received some guff from people wondering why lawmakers are spending their time on "something so frivolous."

"In a way, I'd have to agree," the singer said.

But he said other people have told him his song captures "the spirit of the West and the spirit of a Montana cowboy" and "typifies the spirit of Montana." Cowboys, he said, have demonstrated the traits of gentleness but strength as well as humility but forcefulness.

Overcast said he would be happy to reprise his musical performance in the Capitol, this time before the Senate, if asked.

Stahl said he knew the bill would pass the House, but figured it wouldn't be unanimous because "some people don't like doing frivolous things like this."

"If you were going to have a song that had a part of Montana, it's the 'Montana Lullaby' - singing the cows to sleep at night," Stahl said.

The song describes a lonesome cowboy out on the range rounding up the stray cattle, with the sun "sinkin' low in the west," while he dreams of his Jenny who's home "waitin' alone."

"We'll bed down the strays, we've been gatherin' all day, with a Montana Lullaby," the song goes.

"In my blankets at night, with the moon shinin' bright, dreams of my Jenny drift by," it continues. "Breakin' of dawn brings the meadowlark's song, a Montana Lullaby."

Overcast's yodels run intermittently throughout.

Overcast wrote the lyrics and teamed up with Wylie Gustafson of Cut Bank to write the music.