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Chinook troubadour lulls Legislature

By SARAH COOKE

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HELENA — It's not every day the Legislature hears a bill that's meant to make people fall asleep.

On Thursday, Rep. Wayne Stahl, R-Saco, introduced a proposal to make a cowboy singer-songwriter's tune "Montana Lullaby" the official lullaby of Big Sky Country.

The bill, which drew no opposition, was quickly endorsed by the House State Administration Committee and shipped to the House floor for further debate.

"I think this is very representative of Montana," Rep. Alan Olson, R-Roundup, said of the country music ditty. "I think it's something the people of Montana can be proud of."

Montana already has a state song, "Montana," adopted in 1945, and a state ballad, "Montana Melody," created in 1983. Several states have more than one song — Tennessee has six — but no other state appears to have an official lullaby.

"Montana Lullaby" was written by rancher Ken Overcast of Chinook. It tells of a cowboy rounding up cattle on the range, with the sun "sinkin' low in the west," while he dreams of his Jenny "in my blankets at night, with the moon shinin' bright."

"We'll bed down the strays we've been gatherin' all day, with a Montana lullaby," Overcast crooned in a performance of his song on the House floor Wednesday.

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Rep. Alan Olson, R-Roundup

True to traditional cowboy melodies, he yodels in between verses, a talent that earned him the "Will Rogers Yodeler of the Year" award from the Academy of Western Artists in 2000.

Clad in a cowboy hat and boots and sport-



AP Photo/Independent Record, Jon Ebel

Cowboy singer Ken Overcast of Chinook holds up a music CD of the "Montana Lullaby" following a hearing Thursday before the House State Administration Committee on HB 594 at the Capitol in Helena. The state lullaby bill passed committee and will now be heard on the House floor.

ing a patch over the right eye he lost in a ranching accident, Overcast told House committee members Thursday he was "deeply honored" by the possibility of penning the state lullaby.

"I believe lullabies are almost unique in the fact that there aren't that many of them," he said.

The idea was dreamed up last spring by a Billings museum director and a country music disc jockey, who kept getting requests for the song. They and several others asked Stahl to sponsor the bill.

Overcast, 59, wrote the lyrics to go with a melody by Wylie Gustafson of Conrad for his sixth album, "Montana Cowboy," which was

named the "Best Cowboy Music CD" by True West Magazine in 2003. A third generation Montanan, he's recorded eight albums over 14 years and written two collections of short stories.

Members of the House committee unanimously supported the idea and posed few questions to Overcast and other supporters.

They did, however, want to know about the yodeling. Would it be required?

"The yodeling part is optional," Overcast replied.

The bill is House Bill 594.

On the Net:

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