

December 2, 2021

Commissioner Clayton Christian
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education
560 North Park Avenue
Helena, Montana 59620-3201

Dear Commissioner Christian:

This is a request for the Board of Regents to confirm the recommendation of an honorary degree to be awarded at Montana State University's (MSU) commencement ceremonies in Spring of 2022.

The following individual, Mr. Charles "Chuck" Johnson, was recommended by the Honorary Degree Committee and approved by Faculty Senate.

Mr. Charles "Chuck" Johnson (Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters)

Mr. Charles "Chuck" Johnson is a graduate of the University of Montana and has been one of the most reliable sources of news reporting regarding Montana's government. In his 45 years reporting on Montana politics and government for Montana's largest newspapers and wire services, Chuck Johnson covered 22 legislative sessions, eight governors, nine U.S. senators and 12 U.S. representatives.

His reporting was clear, fair, and balanced and he tackled the toughest, most important issues of Montana's government and its Legislature. He was clearly recognized by other journalists, by legislative staff, by legislators themselves and by members of the executive branch - including the governor at the time, Marc Racicot -- as a walking institution of fairness who doggedly sought to inform the citizens of Montana about how their democracy was working.

Importantly, he always took the time to mentor any young journalist who asked for his help. As such, he became known as the "Dean of Montana Politics," not just for his knowledge, but for his attention to educating the next generations of the Fourth Estate.

I'm unaware of any journalist that has covered Montana politics as long - and with as much universal regard - as Chuck. He is, perhaps the last of his kind. For 45 years, the Montana public could take for granted this reliable, fair, indefatigable and knowledgeable - almost encyclopedic - courier of the news. He was in some ways Montana's version of Walter Cronkite, a trusted presence that everyone knew.

Today, if we have any understanding of how Montana's government came to be in the past years, it is largely thanks to Chuck, who felt a deep sense of duty to keep the public informed, to be a watchdog, to be the Fourth Estate. Though he is now retired, his writings, as far back as 1968, form a cornerstone of our understanding of contemporary Montana politics.

After retiring in 2017, Chuck continued to serve Montana as a member of the board of trustees of the Montana Historical Society. He later joined the Montana Free Press Board of Director, on which he continues to serve. Chuck has helped Montana Free Press - the state's largest member-supported nonprofit news organization - grow from a small, three-person newsroom

Office of the President

216 Montana Hall
P.O. Box 172420
Bozeman, MT 59717-2420
www.montana.edu

Tel 406-994-2341
Fax 406-994-1893

to a thriving news organization with a staff of 10. Chuck has also been an indispensable resource, alongside Montana Free Press reporters and MSU alumna Sarah Vowell, in developing oral history programming for an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Montana Constitutional Convention to be held at Montana State University in early 2022.

In closing, Montana State University wholeheartedly supports the recommendation of Mr. Charles "Chuck" Johnson for an honorary doctorate degree from Montana State University. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration as the students, faculty and staff of Montana State University would be so proud to honor him at our upcoming Spring 2022 commencement ceremonies.

Sincerely,



Waded Cruzado
President