Name of victim of Ronan school bus crash released

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Breaks by [406 MT Sports](http://stats.406mtsports.com/)


**GUEST COLUMN**

**Outdoor REC Act a lifeline for Whitefish**

RICHARD HILDNER  Feb 20, 2017

When Republicans and Democrats agree on an idea, you know it’s likely a good one. Recently, the president signed the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act, a bill that the U.S. Congress passed with unanimous, bipartisan support, including that of U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke, nominee for secretary of the Department of the Interior. Now, for the first time, the nation will have an accurate accounting of jobs associated with America’s great outdoors.

As a member of the Whitefish City Council, I am delighted by news of this bill's passage, as our success in creating jobs locally will now be measured as part of the nation's economic growth.

People are drawn to this area for paddling the Whitefish River, fishing, rafting, hiking and playing in Glacier National Park, or enjoying the slopes at the Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort. Whitefish is known for its endless opportunities for recreation, but without fail, visitors also fall in love with our vibrant community. Local businesses involved in hospitality, dining, guiding and other recreation-based activities are an important economic foundation here in Whitefish.

Although we already know firsthand that tourism-dependent mountain towns like Whitefish are a significant contributor to the American economy, the Outdoor REC Act now directs the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis to coordinate and examine the value of recreation nationwide. For those of us who serve in local government and want to see a more efficient federal bureaucracy, this enhanced accounting, communication and cooperation is exciting. But that’s only the start. This coordination will result in reporting the economic impact of local outdoor recreation and start including outdoor rec dollars when measuring the country’s Gross Domestic Product – a number that affects almost every aspect of America’s economic policies.

Until passage of the Outdoor REC Act, income generated by outdoor recreation was not included as a part of the GDP. Although federal accountants measure the role of other economic sectors such as the arts, oil and gas, and manufacturing, the outdoor industry heretofore was ignored. Yet the outdoor economy is huge: according to the Interior Department, it generates $646 billion to the U.S. economy and provides 6.1 million direct Americans jobs — almost equal to pharmaceuticals and automobile manufacturing combined.

The Outdoor REC Act is an important first step toward better understanding of and accounting for the powerful influence in job creation and economic growth of mountain towns like ours, whose economies are closely linked to outdoor recreation and tourism. Now the federal government has begun to fully recognize and record the economic benefits of outdoor recreation.

Thanks to bipartisan leadership in Congress, the Outdoor REC Act has ensured that the jobs associated with tourism, hunting and fishing, manufacturing of outdoor gear, and visitation to our national parks, forests, monuments and other national public lands will finally be recognized and counted.

I want to personally thank Zinke for understanding the importance of Western public lands not only for our identity and lifestyle, but for building our local economies, as well. I am hopeful that Congressman Zinke, if confirmed as secretary of Interior, will protect and defend our public lands and the jobs and outdoor economy that are dependent upon them.

Richard Hildner is a retired high school teacher and member of the Whitefish City Council.