

November 20-21, 2025

ITEM 221-2001-R1125

Request for Authorization to Award an Honorary Doctorate to Colonel Eric Hastings; Montana State University

THAT

In recognition of many career achievements and the distinction brought to the Montana University System, the Board of Regents grants Montana State University the authority to confer an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Col. Eric Hastings.

EXPLANATION

Bozeman native Col. Hastings was offered a full scholarship for music elsewhere, but he turned it down, knowing that the only place he truly wanted to go was Montana State College (now MSU). At the encouragement of his father, Col. Hastings enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1960 at the age of 17. He graduated a quarter early in March 1964 with a degree in History and Philosophy with a minor in English, while earning his officer's commission and marrying his high school sweetheart in the same year.

Subsequently, Hastings attended every level of military school imaginable and earned two master's degrees along the way. After attending the necessary military schools, Hastings learned to fly the F-8 Crusader, an airplane he "fell in love with", and then the A-4 Skyhawk, which he flew for most of his career, including the 168 combat missions he flew in Vietnam. After his tour in Vietnam, Hastings was sent around the world, eventually reaching the rank of colonel. Colonel Hastings was the chief of staff for Marine forces during Operation Desert Storm in 1990-91.

Upon his retirement from the Marines, Col. Hastings gained admission to one of the most prestigious music schools in the United States: the Mannes School of Music, the New School University. There, as a 51-year-old, Col. Hastings embarked on his lifelong dream of completing a (third) master's degree in piano performance. He was offered the position as Dean of Students at Mannes Conservatory upon graduation but turned this offer down to return to Bozeman to take care of his father, who was dying of cancer.

After his father's passing, Eric cared for his sister Sandra, also an MSC graduate, who needed end-of-life care, and then, his wife of 57 years, Jean. During this twenty-year period, he founded Warriors and Quiet Waters (WQW) Foundation, a national organization supporting post 9-11 veterans and their families. Col. Hastings and his wife Jean founded this organization on a shoestring. It now has an annual budget of \$4M with a \$50M endowment, having served around 1,600 wounded warriors and their families.

In an interview with the Weekly Standard, dated June 20, 2011, Col. Hastings said: "I know what it's like to be in combat, and I also know that semper paratus-always faithful-is more than just a slick motto. You can't just walk off into the sunset. This is an honor contract between Americans and the people who were sent to war in their name."

Colonel Hastings has contributed directly to the well-being of our state's citizens through his distinguished 32-year career in the US Marines, and as founder of the Warriors and Quiet Waters Foundation. He also founded the Gallatin Skyhawk Scholarship Foundation, enabling aspiring military aviators (students from Montana State University) to earn private pilot licenses, making them competitive for selection as military aviators. He has been nationally recognized for his work in leadership positions in the USMC and for his work as founder of Warriors and Quiet Waters.

For these and other extraordinary contributions, the Board of Regents is pleased to confer an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters at Montana State University upon Colonel Eric Hastings and wishes him well for many years in the future.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment #1: Letter of Nomination from President Tessman