



August 29, 2025

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 Col. Eric Hastings, to be awarded at Montana State University's (MSU) commencement ceremony in the Fall 2025. Col. Eric Hastings was recommended by the MSU Honorary Degree Committee and Faculty Senate leadership voted in favor of this honorary degree recommendation.

Col. Eric Hastings (Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters):

Col. Hastings is a Bozeman native who graduated from Bozeman Senior High School. Although he was offered a full scholarship for music elsewhere, 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 wanted to be an aviator and knew that the Marine Corps was the connection he needed. Col. Hastings 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 moved to Hawaii where he learned to fly the F-8 Crusader, an airplane he "fell in love with." He then learned to fly 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 to several places 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. His recital was a triumph, and he subsequently received the Dean's prize in his graduating class. He was offered the possibility of a position as Dean of Students at Mannes Conservatory upon graduation. He turned this offer down to return to Bozeman to take care of his father, who was dying of cancer.

Office of the President

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Whether caring for the young Marines under his command, Wounded Warriors and their families, or his own family members; Col. Hastings cares deeply, no matter the personal cost. He is the epitome of what it means to be a public servant: others before self. Always.

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 ~1,600 wounded warriors and their families. To state that this foundation has literally saved lives, is no exaggeration. 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 fi-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."

Both sons, Col. Eric Christopher Hastings USMC (Ret) and Lieutenant Colonel Kelly Keith Hastings USMC (Ret) are MSU Alumni, as is his granddaughter, Emma Jean Hastings. 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. These young men and women are now serving as frontline Air Force and Marine Corps 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. Few can point to such tangible achievements for the men and women serving in uniform and it would be a tremendous honor for MSU to award Colonel Eric Hastings with an Honorary Doctorate Degree at MSU's Fall 2025 commencement ceremony.

Sincerely,



Brock F. Tessman
President