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## Bedtime tune puts Montana's riled up Capitol at ease

By Gwen Florio, USA TODAY

HELENA, Mont. — Every state has a song, some more than one.

Tennessee has five. New Hampshire has one official song, and eight unofficial melodies. Some state songs — *Georgia On My Mind* — are classics. Most — *Our Delaware* — are not. Massachusetts, but not Wisconsin, has a state polka. And New Jersey has an official Unofficial Youth Anthem, native son Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*.

Apparently no state has a lullaby, and Montana aims to be the first. The state Legislature is considering a bill that would add cowboy singer-songwriter Ken Overcast's *Montana Lullaby* to a list that includes the state song, *Montana*, and state ballad, *Montana Melody*.



Singer Ken Overcast, of Chinook, Mont., holds up a CD of *Montana Lullaby* following a hearing at the Capitol in Helena, Mont., Thursday. The state lullaby bill passed committee and will now be heard on the House floor.

Overcast, 59, ranches on the Hi-Line, the remote, wind-whipped part of Montana that parallels the Canadian border. He wrote the lyrics to go with a melody by former Montana resident Wylie Gustafson.

On Thursday, a House committee unanimously approved the measure sponsored by Rep. Wayne Stahl, a Republican, who has been a fan of Overcast for years.

This particular song, Stahl said, "is one of those cultural, historical things that's probably pretty well lost to most of the world. Texas could probably have a lullaby, or Kansas or Nebraska — those places along the old Chisholm Trail. "Montana is the last of that bastion," he said.

A day earlier, Overcast had performed his lullaby on the House floor. Like not a few of the lawmakers, he came to the Capitol in boots and a broad-brimmed hat. Unlike them, he

carried a guitar and wore an eye patch, the legacy of a long-ago accident involving stirrup leathers and a pair of needle-nose pliers.

The 100 representatives, many of them still edgy from a morning of bitter wrangling over the state budget bill, eased into a rare moment of peace as Overcast sang:

*The sun's sinkin' low in the west and I know  
Another day on the range has gone by  
We'll bed down the strays, we've been gatherin' all day  
With a Montana lullaby.*

Between verses, Overcast — the 1996 Western Music Association Yodeler of the Year yodeled low and sweet, making it sound almost like something anyone could do.

"We should have him come in every day. I think he calmed their nerves quite a bit," Stahl said later.

During Thursday's committee hearing, Rep. Franke Wilmer, a Democrat, nervously queried Overcast about one aspect of the song:

"If it becomes the state lullaby—" she began.

"Yes, ma'am," Overcast responded.

"Are we going to have to learn to yodel?"

"That yodeling part," Overcast reassured her, "is optional."