

Billings Chamber of Commerce  
Convention and Visitors Bureau

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# 2014-2015 Public Policy Manual

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# Priority Issues

## Education

### *Funding for 19 year old K-12 Students*

We support changing the funding formula at the state level to include 19 year old students, and raising the dropout age to 18.

### *School Board Elections*

The Billings Chamber supports well-qualified school board members. The current policy of electing from single-member districts presents challenges in finding well-qualified candidates for the school board. Representing specific districts has been shown to have a divisive effect on the individual board members and district-wide issues do not receive adequate consideration. When the district elected board members at-large, there were many contested races, and candidates had to develop a platform on which they ran and take that message to the general electorate. We support returning to at-large elections. Presently there is no enabling legislation to allow moving to some form of elections other than single-member districts. The Chamber will work to get enabling legislation passed.

## Energy

### *Energy Development in the Region*

The Billings Chamber will continue to promote Billings as a regional hub for doing business in eastern Montana as well as serve as a hub for energy development in other areas of the state as well, whether it is the Rocky Mountain Front, Petroleum County or southern Montana. We specifically support mitigation for energy development infrastructure in eastern Montana.

## Healthcare

### *Expansion of Medicaid*

- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid program which will result in providing health insurance coverage to as many as 70,000 Montanans. Expanding the Montana Medicaid program helps ensure a healthy workforce, slows health insurance costs and sets in place a system of “coverage for all, paid for by all.”
- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid program that requires a private health insurer(s) to manage the program.
- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid Program has the potential to create more than 1,400 jobs and generate approximately \$60 million in annual labor income in Yellowstone County.

## Taxation

### *Local Option Taxing Authority/Expansion of the Resort Tax*

The Chamber supports local option taxing authority as a mechanism for augmenting current revenues for any local jurisdictions such as town, city or county. This would allow for all communities in Montana to determine whether or not they want to implement this tax, and for what purposes. In the event that local option taxing authority expansion fails to receive legislative support, the Chamber supports expansion of the resort tax. Either local option taxing authority or expansion of the resort tax should have local voted authorization and purpose, a sunset provision, and should be used in the community in which it is generated.

### *Business Equipment Taxes*

We support elimination of the business equipment tax as a key measure to maintain our regional competitiveness as we work to support business expansion and new business recruitment as a part of a statewide tax reform package. The state now provides tax replacement to local governments that lose revenue from the equipment tax's elimination and the Chamber supports continuing the loss of revenue offset. We also recommend that the current exemption on computer software be continued.

### *Tax Increment Finance and Business Improvement Districts*

The Chamber supports the ability of Local Governments to establish tax increment finance and business districts that seek to promote economic development, infrastructure expansion and development, and taxable growth. The Chamber will oppose laws or rules which may be proposed by the Montana Legislature or the Montana Department of Revenue that limit or hamper cities' or counties' abilities to adopt and use Tax Increment Finance Districts and Business Improvement Districts.

## Transportation/Managed Growth

### *Public Safety*

- **Public Intoxication** - At present a governmental unit with self-governing powers is prohibited from enacting ordinances prohibiting or penalizing vagrancy. The Billings Chamber supports modification of current statute to allow our police to deal with public intoxication and/or vagrancy which has become a substantial problem in Downtown Billings.
- **Additional Funding for Mental Health Centers** - The Billings Chamber is aware that the demand for mental health services is growing rapidly in Billings while the funding for centers has remained at current levels for a number of years. Funding must be increased substantially to allow communities to deal adequately with this rising problem.
- **Satellite Crime Lab** - The Billings Chamber encourages the Montana Department of Justice to consider setting up a satellite crime lab in Billings rather than expanding its current lab in Missoula. This would save time and expense for samples taken in Billings as well as other communities in eastern Montana that often require an officer deliver them to the crime lab in Missoula.

# Agriculture

## Basic Philosophy

The Billings Chamber of Commerce believes that an economically strong Agriculture Industry is an essential part of the growth and sustainability of our overall economy. With that belief, the Chamber pledges to protect the property rights of those involved in production agriculture. Inherent in these rights is the right to pass property from generation to generation without taxation or penalty.

In addition, the Chamber supports movement toward a taxation system built on the premise of low and fair tax assessment. This is founded in the belief that special incentives, while they may benefit a small sector of the economy, result in higher taxes for all.

Given the fact that Production Agriculture is closely tied to land usage and stewardship, the Chamber supports the development of natural resources in a manner that is both economically viable and environmentally sustainable for the long term.

The Chamber encourages a close working relationship with the board of regents as well as with the Vice President of Agriculture and the Director of the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station at Montana State University regarding facilities and programs of importance to the ag industry

These recommendations include:

- Water and the right to water usage and perpetuation of water rights granted decades ago. In addition the Billings Chamber supports water quality regulations that are founded in need for economically sustainable production.
- Development of energy related resources including coal, oil and natural gas along with renewable energy from wind, solar and hydropower resources. Support of this development includes not only discovery and production of these resources but also the forms of transportation and distribution systems for these resources.
- Livestock and Wildlife Resources. Balancing the rights of Agricultural Producers as they relate to the protection of livestock from the threats of wildlife disease transmission and predatory attacks balanced with the economic benefit gained from the wildlife itself in the form of hunting income and tourism income.

Prior to the start of the 2015 Montana legislative session as well as during the session, the Chamber will consult with and maintain an active involvement with the various state agriculture organizations to determine issues of importance to the agriculture community. It will communicate these areas of concern to the membership, seek input, and determine an appropriate course of action as needed.

## Specific Issues

### *Water Rights Protection*

The Chamber believes that there should be no dilution of water rights and, if anything, these rights should be reaffirmed and strengthened. The Chamber will monitor bill draft requests, proposed and introduced legislation and plan a strategy to deal with issues as they come forth.

### *Regulations regarding Exempt Water Wells*

The Chamber believes that individual property rights need to be protected and agricultural use water well development should be exempt to the extent established in current law.

### *Water Quality and Soil Quality Issues*

The Billings Chamber feels that Montana's existing law should be maintained and supports state's rights to make these determinations.

### *Clean Water Act Policy*

The Billings Chamber will oppose any attempt to pass legislation that will dilute our rights and urge the state to determine and define "navigable" waters.

### *Private land purchases by the state of Montana*

Protecting the rights of property owners is fundamental to the success of a free market economic system, and is an important cornerstone upon which our nation was founded. A strong local economy depends on preserving the right of responsible individuals to freely own, use and transfer real property. There should be no net loss of private land purchases by the state of Montana.

### *Ag Land Valuation/Reappraisal*

If the timeline for reappraisal is considered, we strongly believe that ag reappraisals continue to be done on the current six year cycle and that ag land continue to be valued based on production averages and not valuation

### *Wild Bison*

The Chamber opposes the concept of wild & free roaming bison and the ability of bison or any other alternative livestock to move freely from location to location. Our belief is that this would be taking property rights from private landholders, and will adversely affect public safety.

### *Responsibility for Wildlife*

The Chamber believes that the responsibility for the management of sage grouse habitat, elk, bison and wolves should be managed in such a manner that agricultural producers will not be adversely affected by the threat of disease and/or predation. In addition the Chamber supports sage grouse management plans developed and implemented at the state and local level rather than plans developed and implemented through the Federal Environmental Protection Act.

### *Agriculture Research, Development and Education*

We believe that research stations such as the Southern Agriculture Research Center at Huntley provide an invaluable service to South Central Montana in particular and the state of Montana in general when it comes to agriculture production. The research and development efforts of the Research Centers have greatly increased both production and profitability for Montana farmers and ranchers. We support continued operation of these stations at or greater than the current

level of funding in order to attract and retain quality research and personnel. We will also oppose any attempt to reduce their funding or scope of work

We also support the continuation of the Extension Service Programs at or above current staffing and funding levels. In particular, we support the addition of an Agriculture Energy Specialist, a Sugar Beet Production Specialist, and an Extension Wildlife Specialist.

Finally, we support the continuation of Agriculture Education at all levels, from K-12 through college and encourage higher education to expand and develop new programs and classes as new technology is developed.

#### *Transportation Infrastructure*

The Chamber supports the development of new transportation infrastructures and maintenance of existing systems, including highways, rail lines and pipelines. We oppose any efforts to impede the development of these infrastructures.

#### *Market Development*

The Chamber supports and encourages the development of new commodity markets, both foreign and domestic, as means for Montana producers to take advantage of viable and attractive markets for the advancement of new and improved practices and technology. In addition the Chamber supports value added programs for agriculture products, including farm to consumer and farm to restaurant “Local Sourcing” supply line development programs.

# Education

## Basic Philosophy

The Billings Chamber supports a business and education partnership that will prepare today's students and adult learners for the workplace. The business community is the primary consumer and beneficiary of K-20 education, public, private and home-school. A partnership between business and all sectors of education is vital in order to align academic needs with the practical needs that translate into value for the business community.

We encourage an education system that is connected to the community.

We encourage business involvement in all aspects of public education, including businesses partnering with education entities as part of the learning process.

We support a School Board that understands the impact their decisions have on the business community.

We encourage the school board to look at adding a provision for drug testing for all participants participating in any extracurricular activity.

We support the current Graduation Matters program or any other program which will reduce the dropout rate.

We support continued funding for innovation and improvement efforts related to education that assist the Billings community in attracting new business and training the existing workforce to solve specific business needs.

We expect area graduates to show proficiency in reading, writing, and functional math, as well as consumer education, critical thinking and foundational business skills. We strongly support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

We expect a workforce that is well-prepared to meet business needs, whether that is by college bound students meeting university demands or the non-college bound students achieving a proficient level of technical skill.

We support the need to educate and maintain a well-qualified pool of labor for current business operations, as well as new business development.

We support adult learning and training programs that assist with training the existing work force to expand their skill set.



We encourage and support economic development efforts of the University system, private or public, in coordination with private industry and other government entities.

We recognize and support the education community for the education and nurturing they provide to their students. Their work elevates our entire community, communities around Montana and our country.

## Specific Issues

### *School District 2 Facilities*

In order to support a growing 21st Century economy, it is crucial that Billings have a first-rate public school system. Therefore, the Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in the infrastructure that supports public education, including proactive maintenance and revitalization of existing facilities and continuous long-range planning. The business community needs to be involved in helping the school district define, prioritize and implement its priorities.

### *Education Primary/Secondary Funding*

The Chamber supports quality primary and secondary education that is adequately funded and delivered efficiently. We welcome improvements in the budgeting process, fiscal accountability, and the quality and presentation of discretionary bond issues and mill levies. In addition, the Chamber encourages public-private partnership with the School District.

### *Funding for 19 year old K-12 Students*

We support changing the funding formula at the state level to include 19 year old students, and raising the dropout age to 18.

### *Consolidation of Districts/Superintendent of Schools Role*

The Chamber supports investigating the consolidation of school districts on a statewide level and re-examining the role of the County Superintendent of Schools.

### *School Attendance Areas*

The Chamber supports frequent review and adjustment of the school boundaries. The Chamber also recognizes that individual school boundaries have not been addressed for a number of years. Because of the fluidity of the student population in Billings, boundaries should be readjusted as needed to alleviate overcrowding and busing while balancing class sizes among individual schools. Emphasis must be placed on neighborhood schools rather than busing, assuming cost factors are relatively equal over the long term.

### *Magnet Schools*

The Chamber supports the concept of magnet middle and high schools, which offer specialized curriculum, well-prepared teachers and innovative instruction. A great example of a magnet school is our own Career Center.

### *Dual Credits*

The Chamber continues to support the dual credit program where students can attend college classes at MSUBillings, City College at Montana State University Billings, or Rocky Mountain College and receive both high school and college credit. This program has the potential to alleviate over-crowding in the high schools and increase attendance at MSUBillings, City College, and Rocky Mountain College.

### *Common Core*

The Common Core State Standards are K–12 academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. They were developed by states, and states voluntarily choose to adopt them.

Standards are a critical first step in improving America’s education system. They provide the necessary foundation for local decisions around curriculum, assessments and instruction. The Billings Chamber supports the Common Core initiative.

### *STEM Initiative*

For our community, state and nation, STEM education is foundational for a globally competitive workforce in the 21st century. STEM education integrates the content and skills of science, technology, engineering and mathematics into the teaching and learning process. It equips our current students and future scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills to create new, visionary technologies and confidence to take on new frontiers. STEM-related instruction engages students in inquiry, logical reasoning, collaboration and investigation.

### *Project Lead The Way*

Project Lead The Way is the nation’s leading provider of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs and is now part of School District 2’s elementary curriculum. Through world-class K-12 curriculum, high-quality teacher professional development, and outstanding partnerships, PLTW will help students in Billings develop the skills needed to succeed in the global economy. The Chamber supports implementation of programs that promote preparing students for a global economy.

### *Business to School Ambassadors/Partners in Education*

The Chamber supports business to education ambassadors/partners in education program. Business ambassadors/partners would be assigned to school principals and to administrative personnel. This program helps the individual school staffs understand educational support by the business community and promotes interaction between business and education. We also encourage and support the business community to offer internships and/or apprenticeships as a way to bridge the work gap between the education system and the business community.

### *Financial Advice*

The Chamber should be an integral partner regarding financial information and value judgments that become part of the school budget. We support the goals of all levels of education for numerous reasons and want to assist with delivering these services in a manner that is efficient and represents fiscal responsibility to the taxpayer. The Chamber will help to evaluate the financial information and promote understanding of the values underlying budgets of various educational institutions. The Chamber also feels that the business community has a responsibility to fill the role for fiscal oversight regarding school budgets.

### *School Board Elections*

The Billings Chamber supports well-qualified school board members. The current policy of electing from single-member districts presents challenges in finding well-qualified candidates for the school board. Representing specific districts has been shown to have a divisive effect on the individual board members and district-wide issues do not receive adequate consideration. When the district elected board members at-large, there were many contested races, and candidates had to develop a platform on which they ran and take that message to the general electorate. We support return

ing to at-large elections. Presently there is no enabling legislation to allow moving to some form of elections other than single-member districts. The Chamber will work to get enabling legislation passed.

In an effort to educate community members about the role and responsibilities of being a school board member, the Chamber has held an annual school board candidate school, and will continue to do so as long as there is a need.

### *School Board Committees*

The Billings Chamber encourages the school district to develop and implement advisory committees such as Facilities, Long Range Planning, Common Core, Accreditation Standards, Employee Benefits and Budgets. A committee structure, made up of the business community in particular, is an educational opportunity for potential board member candidates, as well as a means for communication between the district and the business community.

### *Work Readiness Credential*

The Billings Chamber believes that a skills profile and assessment that measures the proficiency of entry level workers should be a testing mechanism that is performed while the individual is still in school. The testing should measure the individuals basic and soft skills and testing should include but not be limited to:

1. Situational judgment
2. Communication Skills
3. Read with understanding
4. Use math to solve problems

When individuals successfully complete the assessment they receive a National Work Readiness Credential as a confirmation that they have the skills to add value on the frontline in entry level workplaces.

### *Non-Traditional Educational Opportunities*

The Billings Chamber knows education does not begin or end with the traditional “school day”. We support the efforts of community-based organizations engaged in public/private partnerships, which provide school-age children with a continuum of support designed keep students in school and bridge the gap between the classroom and the work force. In addition to the daily support designed to meet students basic physical, emotional and academic needs, these organizations provide intentional programs designed to expose students to the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and activities which will create enthusiasm and assist students with developing goals and planning to secure employment in a STEM related career.

### *Post-Secondary Education Faculty/Funding*

The Chamber supports a quality system of higher education. To ensure academic excellence, the Chamber supports the development of any mechanism that will enable the universities to attract and retain outstanding faculty. The Chamber supports expanding incentives.

### *Post-Secondary Education Interface with Healthcare*

The Chamber supports strengthening the stature of higher education in Billings through collaboration with our local healthcare industry and business community.

### *Bioscience Research and Development*

There is great potential in local economic development involving bioscience research and development. Beginning with the Career Center students, collaboration between the healthcare industry with Rocky Mountain College, City College at Montana State University Billings and Montana State University Billings is particularly essential to success in this area.

### *Workforce Needs and Shortages*

There are many shortages right now in the field of healthcare. Higher education is critical in providing education, training, and opportunities for degree advancement.

### *Higher-Education Collaboration*

Collaboration between Montana's higher education institutions and businesses benefits consumers of healthcare services, our local economy and employees. Strengthening the stature of higher education in Billings will assist the healthcare industry in recruiting and retaining physicians and other healthcare professionals.

### *Post-Secondary Education Interface with Business*

The Chamber encourages the continuation and expansion of dialogue and cooperative ventures between higher education and private businesses that address workforce training needs and shortages while promoting partnerships for business opportunities.

### *Post-Secondary Education Facilities*

The Chamber supports continuation of a formal long-range capital building plan for the University system. Montana State University-Billings is an integral part of our community and investment in its infrastructure is critical to its continuation. We support the acquisition of additional land where needed to ensure orderly long term growth.

### *Six-mill Post-Secondary Education Statewide Funding*

Until a better alternative is found, the Chamber supports funding of the six-mill levy for higher education.

### *Advanced Degree Options for Loan Assistance/Repayment*

The Chamber realizes that advanced degree students usually leave the education system with very substantial outstanding student loans. The Chamber supports programs offered in the public or private sectors that have an opportunity for repayment or forgiveness if the student stays employed in Montana.

# Energy

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber is an advocate of a nationwide free market in respect to energy. We recognize that the production, processing and distribution of energy create good-paying primary and secondary jobs and provide fiscal benefit to the State of Montana. We believe that in a free market, the needs of adequate power and fair power pricing will be established. We believe that increasing the supply of energy in Montana, including oil, coal, methane, wind, fuel cells, gas, solar and alternative methods will help find a solution to the current and future power needs facing our state and country. Energy production, processing and distribution methods, traditional and alternative, may prove to be economical and efficient ways to accomplish this goal. The Chamber also encourages conservation efforts allowing our current supply of energy to be sustained. Streamlining the permitting process and limiting the appeals process for both production and transportation systems related to energy development is critical.

## Specific Issues

### *Responsible Energy Exploration and Development*

Responsible energy exploration and development on public and private lands is crucial to resolving our nation's energy crisis and building Montana's economy.

### *Natural Gas Development*

The Chamber believes that natural gas development should be explored and may be beneficial to stimulating the state's economy. We recognize that coal bed natural gas is an abundant resource that holds great potential for development. Other sources for natural gas include landfills, sewage treatment and animal waste. We will support legislative efforts that seek to encourage environmentally responsible natural gas development and deployment.

### *Publicly Owned Energy Facilities/Infrastructure*

We generally oppose any public competition in the private business arena. Any attempts by the State of Montana, or local governmental entities, to own or operate existing or new power generation facilities/power distribution infrastructure, unless in a public-private partnership, must be subject to the most stringent cost benefit analysis to the stakeholders.

### *Other Alternative Sources*

The Chamber supports alternative power generators such as wind, solar, fuel cells and others as long as they are effective and all costs are disclosed.

### *Oil Refineries*

The Chamber supports the growth and greater production of existing area oil refineries, as well as the construction of new refineries utilizing the latest in refining technology.

### *Public Policy*

Consistent public policy and prudent tax policy needs to occur for long-term planning, production, processing and distribution. For example, recently the EPA designated an area around the Corette Plant as a non-attainment area because of emissions discharges from three years prior. There are also changing regulations regarding coal burning power plants that will also have significant impact on Montana.

### *Sage Grouse*

There is a very real threat that Sage Grouse could be listed under the Endangered Species Act which would significantly impact the energy and agriculture sectors of Montana's economy. The Chamber supports efforts by the state of Montana to develop its own plan for protecting the nesting grounds as long as it will minimally impact our energy and agriculture sectors.

### *Carbon Sequestration*

We support Carbon Sequestration Legislation and Rule Making if technology is available and affordable, and is justified by a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis.

### *Coal Reserves*

We support the development of coal reserves in Southeastern Montana. We recognize the importance of coal production in providing economic benefits and opportunity to local communities in this region and the spillover benefits that result for the Billings area and our members. We also recognize the significance of coal production to the state economy and the financial assistance it affords local communities throughout Montana. The responsible and timely development of new coal mines will provide a much needed economic boost to Montana. We therefore support efforts that will enable new coal production to occur, including the development of railroad infrastructure and securing access to federal and state-owned coal reserves.

### *Coal Bed Natural Gas Water Discharge*

Recognizing that water is the lifeblood of Montana and recognizing that coal bed natural gas production brings up volumes of this precious resource in the daily operation of energy production, we support water management practices based on sound science that is based on DEQ and EPA standards. Further, we support practices that provide for beneficial use of this water resource whenever feasible. Because of the complexities of individual land use, landowner preferences, and water quality and quantity, we also support the implementation of a toolbox approach to water management. The toolbox approach allows the operator and landowner to use sound science and knowledge of the land to develop site specific management plans that will maximize beneficial uses, protect the environment and allow the economic benefit of energy production.

### *Energy Infrastructure*

A key to energy development in Montana is the ability to move these natural resources from area of development to the ultimate market. The Billings Chamber supports the development of pipelines, such as the Keystone XL pipeline and the Baker to Billings pipeline that will move crude oil to the refineries in Billings and on the Gulf Coast. We will continue to support development of pipelines that are necessary to oil and gas development.

Also, it is important for our coal mines to be able to move their product from the mine mouth to the ultimate customer. The Billings Chamber will continue to support coal and oil train traffic through the Billings area while exploring alternatives that would mitigate transportation issues

related to increased use of existing rail services.

*Energy Development in the Region*

The Billings Chamber will continue to promote Billings as a regional hub for doing business in eastern Montana as well as serve as a hub for energy development in other areas of the state as well, whether it is the Rocky Mountain Front, Petroleum County or southern Montana. We specifically support mitigation for energy development infrastructure in eastern Montana.

# Healthcare

## Basic Philosophy

Comprising 15 percent of Yellowstone County's economic base, health care plays a pivotal role in the economic health of Billings, Yellowstone County, our region and the State of Montana. The sector includes world class hospitals, leading community-based health care, senior nursing home and assisted living facilities, Veterans' health services, Native American health services and numerous other health-related services such as dental providers and mental health professionals and services. Because of easy availability of health services, Billings is a desirable community in which to not only raise a family but also retire.

## Specific Issues

The health care sector is undergoing significant transformation as a result of the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) and industry awareness of needed delivery system changes to benefit patients. With an emphasis on disease prevention including dental, health outcomes and providing better care at a reasonable cost, the ACA will continue to provide both opportunities and challenges to health care providers, government and private insurers.

As implementation of the ACA continues, we encourage and support:

- Strong collaboration between hospitals, physicians, public and preventive health providers, government officials and the general public to contain health care costs, as well as improve quality and access of care;
- Individual responsibility in wellness/prevention efforts and appropriate access of health care;
- The care, safety and treatment of our most vulnerable citizens: children, elderly, disabled;
- A viable private and public health care system that empowers individuals in health promotion and disease prevention activities while recognizing a strong health care safety net for those community members in need;
- Tax-exempt status for non-profit health care and human service providers;
- Ongoing scrutiny, participation and consideration of medical liability reform measures;
- Increased dental, vision and eye-care access for low-income individuals and families, especially children.

### *Jobs/Economy*

The health care sector in Billings serves people in nearly half of Montana and parts of Wyoming and the Dakotas. Economically, total health care spending in Billings exceeds \$1 billion annually and employs one of every ten workers in Billings, who earn better than average wages. As our population continues to grow, the demand for health care services will also grow. Impacting ability of the healthcare industry to provide health care serves is our aging health care workforce, and therefore we must continue our efforts to recruit and retain the current health care workforce as well as develop the next generation of health care providers. Specifically, we:



- Support K-12 education as an important foundation for health care workforce retention and recruitment;
- Support Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) in nurturing and encouraging young people to develop an interest in health careers thus expanding the pipeline of health professionals;
- Support institutions of higher education by strengthening health care learning opportunities, specifically through MSUBillings City College Nursing and Health Programs, the MSU-B College of Allied Health Services and the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho regional medical education network through the University of Washington School of Medicine;
- Support state funding for Graduate Medical Education (GME) so that residency programs such as the Montana Family Medicine Residency, the Rocky Mountain College Physician Assistant program, and the Billings Clinic Internal Medicine Residency continue to flourish;
- Support education, development and training entry-level health care workers and allied health professionals.
- Support efforts to maintain and support a lifestyle for quality of life for Billings and Yellowstone County residents.
- Support a state of Montana tuition repayment program, in partnership with the healthcare community, for physicians who take up residency in rural Montana.
- High Quality and Accessible Care

Due to the rural nature of Montana and adjacent states, Billings is a destination for specialty health care services not available in surrounding rural communities. Because of this, the Billings community must retain and strengthen partnerships with critical access hospitals, physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners and other health care providers in an effort to retain primary care and emergency care in rural areas. Furthermore, there is limited access to mental health and substance abuse services across Montana and it is in Billings' best interest to support high quality accessible services in these areas. Specifically, we:

- Support stable funding for the Community Crisis Center (CCC), a health care safety net partnership providing “no wrong door” for people with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders. In eight years of operation, the CCC has dramatically decreased admissions to the State Hospital in Warm Springs as well as curtailing inappropriate use of the Yellowstone County Detention facility.
- Support adequate reimbursement and expansion of tele-health services throughout eastern Montana as a cost-savings initiative.
- Support any legislative or community action to address chronic alcohol addiction problems.

### *Affordable Health Care Coverage*

Historically nearly twenty percent of Montanans have not had health insurance. In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled affirmatively on the constitutionality of the ACA, specifically the so-called individual mandate that everyone have health insurance coverage. To that end, the Billings health care community has been helping people enroll in the Health Insurance Marketplace (health insurance exchange). Enrollment in Health Insurance Marketplace plans across Montana exceeded 36,500 people at the end of the open enrollment period in mid-April.

While it is unknown at this time how many of the newly insured Montanans were Yellowstone County residents, more than 7,200 applicants in our community did not meet the income qualifications to receive health insurance premium assistance to purchase plans on the Marketplace. Those lacking health insurance are often unable to afford preventive health care services, and emergency and other services usually become unreimbursed costs that are absorbed by health care facilities.

Last year, more than \$125 million in uncompensated care was provided to low-income Montanans, with almost half of that shortfall absorbed by Billings' area healthcare providers. The costs of this care were shifted to private and self-insured health plans, resulting in higher health insurance costs for employers and their employees. We support coverage for low-income, uninsured Montanans.

### *Expansion of Medicaid*

- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid program which will result in providing health insurance coverage to as many as 70,000 Montanans. Expanding the Montana Medicaid program helps ensure a healthy workforce, slows health insurance costs and sets in place a system of “coverage for all, paid for by all.”
- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid program that requires a private health insurer(s) to manage the program, and that the program is written to end if the federal government abandons its commitment to provide funding.
- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid Program that includes reforms and meaningful cost containment measures thus ensuring better value for the tax dollars we spend.
- Expansion of the Montana Medicaid Program has the potential to create more than 1,400 jobs and generate approximately \$60 million in annual labor income in Yellowstone County.

### *A Healthy Community*

The United States continues to spend more on clinical health costs than nearly every other country, yet we do not lead the way in health status. Investing in population-based health improvement strategies to make the healthy choice the easy choice, is one way to stretch our health dollars. We support the continuation of building a strong public health infrastructure as well as a fiscally responsible approach in the creation of policies, programs and services which keep people healthier now, thus reducing the demand for medical care throughout their lives. We will continue to rely on the tri-annual Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment and other data sources to identify the health needs of our community as well as develop and implement plans to improve the health of our community. Specifically:

- We support evidence-based chronic disease risk reduction measures that incorporate tobacco use prevention, physical activity promotion and sound nutrition policy;
- We support measures to decrease the suicide rate in Montana. Currently, Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the country.
- We support strengthening remedies for substance-related and distracted driving abuses;
- We support strategies to increase immunization rates.

# Taxation

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes in comprehensive tax plan requiring statewide reform that is equitable and takes into account the need for responsible and efficient government. The tax structure needs to provide sustainable and adequate funding for necessary services and should promote planned economic development and growth through the creation of positive economic policies. This type of mandate requires broad support throughout the state from legislators, the business community, cities and counties, and the general public. The Chamber will continue to support statewide tax reform, which may include a statewide general sales tax, as well as weighing the pros and cons of any such reform, and will work to move acceptable legislation forward.

As an alternative to passage and implementation of a general sales and use tax, the Chamber realizes that it may be necessary to devote its resources to passage of some type of alternative tax if a general sales tax meets substantial resistance. A crucial element of comprehensive sales tax reform must include, but not be limited to, significant reductions in property and/or income tax while remaining substantially revenue neutral for Montana taxpayers and must return a portion of the tax collected to local government. If the option to be pursued becomes a local option taxing authority or an expansion of the resort tax, implementation must be approved by a majority vote of the electorate, must have a stated purpose(s) for the funds proposed to be collected, and must have a sunset provision.

Tax incentives should only be considered as an alternative option, and should be available to both new and expanding businesses. Tax policy should provide adequate funding for the public well-being, without hindering the ability of business to create, compete and react in the free market.

Government has an obligation to use tax revenue prudently, providing the best services at a reasonable cost.

During previous sessions of the legislature, the Montana Department of Revenue proposed several pieces of legislation which would move authority for decision making from the local level to the state. The Chamber believes that consolidation of this authority is not in the best interests of the communities throughout Montana and will work to retain these powers at the local level.

## Specific Issues

### *Tax Increment Finance and Business Improvement Districts*

The Chamber supports the ability of Local Governments to establish tax increment finance and business districts that seek to promote economic development, infrastructure expansion and development, and taxable growth. The districts need to be established in cooperation with, and possibly benefit, other tax entities such as local school districts, cities, and counties. The Chamber will

oppose laws or rules which may be proposed by the Montana Legislature or the Montana Department of Revenue that limit or hamper cities' or counties' abilities to adopt and use Tax Increment Finance Districts and Business Improvement Districts.

#### *Local Option Taxing Authority/Expansion of the Resort Tax*

The Chamber supports local option taxing authority as a mechanism for augmenting current revenues for any local jurisdictions such as town, city or county. This would allow for all communities in Montana to determine whether or not they want to implement this tax, and for what purposes. In the event that local option taxing authority expansion fails to receive legislative support, the Chamber supports expansion of the resort tax. Either local option taxing authority or expansion of the resort tax should have local voted authorization and purpose, a sunset provision, and should be used in the community in which it is generated.

#### *Statewide Sales Tax*

The Chamber supports a statewide sales and use tax with the current constitutional cap of 4%, primarily as a replacement tax and as part of a broader tax reform plan.

#### *Estate Tax*

The Chamber supports monitoring efforts to continue reduction of the estate tax and increasing the estate tax exemption. We will evaluate each piece of legislation and take positions when we feel it necessary and appropriate.

#### *Montana Income Tax Credit for Gifts to Charitable Endowments*

This credit provides for a 40% credit up to \$10,000 (\$20,000 for married filing joint) of the federal income tax deduction allowed for a planned gift to the endowment of a Montana charity. It also provides for a 20% credit up to \$10,000 for an outright gift by a business to the endowment of a Montana charity. This is an important tool for charitable organizations in Montana and the Billings Chamber continues to support the extension or reauthorization of this tax credit by the Montana Legislature.

#### *Corporate and Individual Tax Simplification*

In addition to having relatively high-income rates, especially in our region, the Montana tax system and requirements are needlessly complex and burdensome for taxpayers. The Billings Chamber supports tax simplification efforts that will reduce the overall time and expense for Montana taxpayers to simply comply with the income tax rules. Tax simplification should be overall revenue-neutral.

#### *Fees*

The Chamber believes fees must be tied to services rendered, not created as a replacement for lost taxing authority. Therefore, they should reflect the cost of providing that service. The Chamber also believes that powers that rest with local authorities, such as tax abatement should remain within the local jurisdiction and should not be assumed by the Montana Department of Revenue.

#### *Property Taxes*

The Chamber supports basing property taxes on assessed value, not acquisition value. Additionally, the Chamber believes that a six year cycle for reappraisal is too long, and supports putting commercial and residential property on a four year cycle for reappraisal, with approximately one fourth of all property reappraised each year. This would put reappraisal on a four year rolling cycle

and should reduce costs for staff to complete the reappraisal each cycle. If the timeline for reappraisal is considered, we strongly believe that agriculture reappraisals continue to be done on the current six year cycle and that ag land continue to be valued based on production averages and not valuation.

#### *Business Equipment Taxes*

We support elimination of the business equipment tax as a key measure to maintain our regional competitiveness as we work to support business expansion and new business recruitment as a part of a statewide tax reform package. The state now provides tax replacement to local governments that lose revenue from the equipment tax's elimination and the Chamber supports continuing the loss of revenue offset. We also recommend that the current exemption on computer software be continued.

#### *Oil Impact and Royalty Fee Distribution*

The impacts of oil development in Eastern and Central Montana and the lack of an adequate funding source for remediation will continue to be a critical issue in affected areas. The Billings Chamber will assist where possible to develop or enhance funding streams that will help communities impacted by oil development. Presently there is a two year delay before any royalty fees reach the counties. Cities and towns realize very little, if any, funding as a result of this development. The Billings Chamber supports a more equitable distribution of energy income received by the state of Montana.

#### *Real Estate Investment Trusts*

The Chamber feels that this type of legislation would be a significant disincentive to business development in Montana and opposes this measure.

#### *Lodging Facility Use Taxes*

The Billings Chamber opposes any further transfer of funds from their traditional purpose and using them for any other purpose.

#### *Modify Existing Montana Laws to Match Existing Federal Attorney Fee Provisions*

In order to provide a broader basis for a prevailing private party to recover its attorney's fees in civil litigation with the state government, the Chamber supports expanding the present standard, which provides that attorney's fees are only recoverable when the government acts in bad faith or frivolously. Analogously to a standard under federal law, the state should adopt legal provisions allowing a prevailing private party to recover its attorney's fees in civil litigation whenever the government fails to establish that its position in the proceeding was substantially justified. Such a provision will also have the beneficial effect of limiting overreaching by the government at the expense of private parties.

#### *Alternative Minimum Tax*

The Chamber supports eliminating the federal Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT).

#### *Clarify Confidentiality Laws*

The Chamber is opposed to any legislation that would allow disclosure of any corporate or individual tax returns, as well as any exchange of this information among state agencies.

# Transportation/ Managed Growth

## Basic Philosophy

A fully integrated transportation network is essential to our economy. In addition to traveling to and from work, we count on transportation every time we make an on-line purchase on the Internet, every time we expect an urgent overnight delivery, and every time we shop for fresh foods and produce at the local market. Without extensive, well-maintained roads and highways, a well-managed public transit and rail system, and modern airports, our quality of life suffers.

The Chamber believes that a strong economy and quality of place are fostered through well-planned community development. Managed growth encourages infill development and re-development and stresses the efficient use of open space. We believe that a quality transportation system, both surface and air, that connects Billings locally and regionally is essential for a strong local economy and for the success of Billings' area businesses in the regional and national markets.

Knowing that goods and services can be provided only as fast and effectively as our transportation system allows, the Billings Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Legislation that protects the integrity and level of funding of both the Federal and State Highway Trust and Road Funds, including funding for trails and bike paths, ensures all current funds are utilized, and seizes the opportunity to rectify the impact of alternative fuels on these funds.
- Development and expansion of air transportation infrastructure, including runways and terminals, to facilitate the ongoing increase in passenger miles and the expected growth of air cargo.
- Public transportation systems that ease traffic congestion, conserve energy, increase mobility, create jobs, and generally stimulate the economy.

## Specific Issues

### *Transportation Corridors*

The Chamber supports improvements to transportation corridors locally and regionally that will enhance economic development and quality of life. Corridors should include non-motorized components as well as aesthetic enhancements whenever possible. Corridors presently identified are:

- a. East End Entrance to Billings from Interstate 90, Exit 452 (known as the Trailhead Entryway)
- b. Inner Belt Loop/Zimmerman Trail
- c. Montana Highway 3 (Billings to Great Falls)
- d. Interstate 90
- e. King Avenue West
- f. Main Street in the Heights

### *Subdivision and Zoning Regulations*

The Chamber supports subdivision and zoning regulations that encourage efficient, orderly development, while allowing flexible and innovative development strategies. The Chamber supports the use of carefully considered incentives to encourage developers to invest in amenities such as parks, trails and open space.

### *City-County Planning*

The Chamber supports the combined City-County planning department to best plan for the future growth of the greater Billings community. A cohesive City-County growth strategy is critical to provide for an efficient development process. The Chamber supports appropriate County zoning, subdivision and development standards for areas close to the City limits that are compatible with City standards and reflect the likelihood that these areas will eventually be annexed into the City. Proactive community planning, which articulates a community's vision for future development, requires the inclusion of private property. The Chamber supports the rights of private property owners and encourages substantial public notice to encourage the participation of property owners in community planning efforts. The Chamber does not believe that it is necessary or practical to require explicit permission from property owners when planning on a general level.

### *City Annexation Policy*

1. Pursue a long term policy that would include an annual tracking of growth within the city as well as in the 5 mile limit area. The Chamber supports actively pursuing alternative sources of revenue for cities and towns through the legislative process.
2. The Chamber supports City annexation of new development areas as a means to manage growth. The City provides infrastructure that supports economic development and City zoning and development regulations provide the guidelines for orderly, efficient growth.
3. Encourage the City and County to support additional funding for the City-County Planning Department.
4. Continue to support the redevelopment of the East Billings Urban Renewal District, the City Center/North 27th Street Renewal District and the South Billings Urban Renewal District as strategic in-fill developments for the community.

### *Public and Alternative Forms of Transportation*

In this era of traffic congestion, high gas prices, climate change, health concerns, and fiscal constraints, federal, state and local transportation funding has reached a crossroads. The Chamber supports investment in a more diverse transportation system that provides viable choices to walk and bike, use public transportation in addition to driving, and will lead to a far more efficient use of our transportation resources. The Chamber also feels that there is a need to develop a comprehensive trail system for the economic and healthy community benefits that result from active transportation (to work and school and for leisure), and communicate the quality of place and economic benefits to the business community and general public. We need to bring trail support groups and stakeholders together to find solutions to connect our trails and keep them clean, safe and well maintained. We will seek federal support through transportation and appropriations bills.

### *Public Utilities*

The Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in public utilities as a way to manage the pattern of City growth and to discourage sprawl and encourage compact, space-efficient growth.

### *Quality of Place Amenities*

The Chamber believes that proactive planning and investment in quality of place amenities, such as parks, trails, preserved open space, and recreational and cultural facilities is crucial to attracting economic investment and maintaining a vibrant work force.

### *Air Service*

Air Service must be maintained in Billings with challenging marketplace conditions and stresses on the airline. We will work to increase needed direct flights. The Chamber also supports the continuation of Essential Air Service subsidies. The 1978 Airline Deregulation Act promoted the continuation of the EAS, stating, “The maintenance of a comprehensive and convenient system of continuous airline service for small communities and for isolated areas, with direct federal assistance, where appropriate, is necessary.”

### *Eminent Domain*

Condemnation is a tool that government can use to acquire private property when a parcel is necessary to complete a project that is deemed to be for the public good. The Chamber recognizes the inherent conflict between private property rights and government’s power of eminent domain. While the Chamber staunchly supports the rights of private property owners, we support the use of condemnation when the following criteria have been met:

1. The condemned property is needed to complete a public infrastructure project that was identified through an open public process.
2. The proposed project is necessary to facilitate the orderly growth, safety, and economic development of Billings.
3. Monitor the process to insure fairness.

### *Public Safety*

- Public Intoxication - At present a governmental unit with self-governing powers is prohibited from enacting ordinances prohibiting or penalizing vagrancy. The Billings Chamber supports modification of current statute to allow our police to deal with public intoxication and/or vagrancy which has become a substantial problem in Downtown Billings.
- Additional Funding for Mental Health Centers - The Billings Chamber is aware that the demand for mental health services in Billings is growing rapidly while the funding for centers has remained at current levels for a number of years. Funding must be increased substantially to allow communities to deal adequately with this rising problem.
- Satellite Crime Lab - The Billings Chamber encourages the Montana Department of Justice to consider setting up a satellite crime lab in Billings rather than expanding its current lab in Missoula. This would save time and expense for samples taken in Billings and surrounding communities in eastern Montana that often require an officer deliver them to the crime lab in Missoula.



# Travel and Tourism

## Basic Philosophy

Tourism plays a crucial role in the Billings economy. More than two million visitors travel to Billings every year spending \$250 million dollars. Tourism is a major employer and directly generated \$3.3 billion dollars in new money for the state of Montana in 2012. The Billings Chamber believes that in order to create a vibrant tourism destination, the community must support its demand generators: those activities and facilities that bring guests to Billings. As a destination, there must also be adequate funding to recruit groups and individual leisure visitors through marketing and sales.

## Specific Issues

### *Tourism Promotion*

The Chamber realizes that state tourism promotion funding is inadequate. The Chamber supports the state lodging tax and the positive impacts that are made in statewide, regional and local tourism marketing. To be most effective on a local and regional level, the Chamber supports substantial reform to the rules and regulations administered through the state Tourism Advisory Council. The Chamber opposes additional use of the bed tax funds for infrastructure, or any reductions to local marketing agencies such as the Chamber. Any attempt to reallocate or increase the bed tax for any purpose other than the promotion of tourism will be vigorously opposed. The 3% general fund lodging tax should be allocated specifically to state tourism with a portion granted to regions and CVBs. The Chamber opposes any changes, additions or deletions to the current Tourism Business Improvement District laws that are now in place.

### *Incentives*

The Chamber supports carefully considered incentives to lure conventions, groups and the film industry to the state.

### *MetraPark*

MetraPark is a vital part of the tourism infrastructure and the Chamber believes this is a critical time for master planning of this facility.

- We support a complete assessment of facility and grounds' future use that will drive the most business to the community and the facility as well as investigating operating opportunities to improve revenues and aid in funding capital improvement projects.
- We support the facility's operation as a subsidized attraction in driving business to Billings and Yellowstone County.
- We support public investment to improve and maintain the facility and grounds.
- The Chamber encourages the County to maintain adequate reserves to pay for such capital repairs and replacements in the future.

### *Potential East End Hospitality Corridor and City Entrance*

The Billings Chamber recommends that consideration be given to developing the East End entrance to Billings through way finding signage, beautification, aesthetic landscaping and ease of access. Gateway aesthetics are important to visitor growth.

### *Convention Center*

The Billings Chamber supports seeking research regarding the development of a convention center to help grow the meeting and convention segment of the local tourism industry.

### *Brand Builders*

The Chamber supports demand generating infrastructure and programs to bring visitors, athletes, companies and conventions to Billings while increasing our quality of life as residents. These infrastructure amenities include natural, historic and cultural amenities.

# Workforce/ Business Development

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that a successful business is a joint effort among ownership, management, and labor. To be successful, a working relationship must be developed and encouraged. Free market forces should play a strong role in establishing and maintaining a positive employer/employee relationship. Small businesses make a distinct and creative contribution to the Billings economy. For many seeking economic independence, small business ownership offers the greatest opportunity. Small businesses produce a major share of business innovation. Their numbers make them the largest source of private employment and the most tangible local representation of the private enterprise system in America today.

## Specific Issues

### *Medical Marijuana*

The Billings Chamber supports SB423 which was passed in the 2011 session of the legislature. In its current form, it rescinds the action taken through the passage of the medical marijuana Referendum in 2007. We believe that allowing the distribution and sale of an illegal substance sends a conflicting message. We support total repeal of the original referendum. We will strongly oppose any attempt to either expand or legalize medical and/or recreational marijuana.

### *Workforce Training*

Publicly funded worker training is essential in order for Montana to be competitive when it comes to industry retention/expansion and new industry recruitment. We support continued funding to help offset the cost of training individuals for newly created “base industry sector” jobs as enacted and funded by previous legislatures. We support and encourage continuing skills training through local educational organizations, the local building trades unions and other sources. Training through the various Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees (JATC) is funded through employee and employer contributions. Furthermore, we support expanding training funds and programs for incumbent worker training to assist existing businesses to expand and to utilize the talents of their incumbent workers to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace. Advancing incumbent workers to more technical and skilled positions within their companies will provide positive results for the worker, the business and Montana’s economy. We support the reduction of bureaucratic costs and improved efficiencies in the workforce system resulting in maximizing funding to train workers and assist businesses.

### *Wrongful Discharge*

Montana’s Wrongful Discharge Act, being the only statute of its kind in the nation, has an adverse impact on recruiting new businesses to Montana. The Chamber vigorously opposes any action or legislation it deems will have an effect of eroding employer’s rights under the current statutes. We will support any improvements or modifications to this statute which would enhance Montana’s

ability to attract and retain new or existing businesses.

### *Drug and Alcohol Free Workplace*

We support clarification and expansion of the 1999 legislation to allow universal drug and alcohol testing of employees with proper procedures established to safeguard the innocent.

### *Workers Compensation*

Workplace safety is the shared responsibility of employers and employees. We support the pursuit and prosecution of worker's compensation fraud whether perpetuated by an employee or an employer. We support a competitive insurance market for workers' compensation, not dominated by a single insurance carrier or the State Fund. We support the exclusive remedy doctrine for workplace injuries with the inherent trade off of legislated benefits for the injured worker without having to prove negligence. We support prompt delivery of reasonable and appropriate benefits to a worker who, in the scope and course of employment, has suffered an injury or illness as a result of a workplace environment. The Billings Chamber encourages employer/employee participation in programs that promote safety in the workplace such as SafeMT. During the 2011 session of the legislature, an important first step was implemented to reduce the cost of worker compensation. We support carefully crafted legislation which will further reduce the cost of workers compensation. To be effective in reducing costs, equal attention must be given to workplace safety.

### *Wages*

The Chamber believes in the ability of market forces to set wages and benefit levels. We oppose the creation of livable wage legislation.

### *Public Employees Retirement Plan Benefits*

In the last session of the legislature, there was a strong effort to move from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan for the Montana Public Employees and the Billings Chamber anticipates it will be addressed again in the 2015 session. Almost all private sector plans are defined contribution plans while many public sector plans are defined benefit plans. The Billings Chamber supports moving to a mandatory defined contribution method for new employees participating in the Public Employees Retirement Funds.

### *Unemployment*

More and more Montana employers are expressing frustrations with Montana's Unemployment Insurance system. Often we hear that employees who quit or are fired for legitimate reasons end up receiving unemployment benefits, which only drives up the cost. The Billings Chamber supports the position ensuring that unemployment benefits will only go to those who are legally entitled to receive unemployment benefits.

### *H2B Visa*

An H2B visa is a temporary work visa for foreign workers with a job offer for seasonal, non-agricultural work in the US. The H2B visa program is open to nationals of countries designated by the United States Secretary of Homeland Security and is capped at 66,000 visas per year from October 1 – September 30. Those with a temporary job offer in an agricultural industry may be eligible for a H2B visa which is exempt from this cap. In addition, the applicant must have a temporary or seasonal offer of employment that can be classified as a one-time occurrence, peak load, intermittent or seasonal need. Furthermore, the prospective employer must demonstrate that the

position cannot be filled by a US worker. H2B visa applicants may also be required to meet certain health and character requirements. The Billings Chamber supports the continuation of this program and supports efforts in Congress to protect the program. This is vital to the well-being of the number of industries in Montana that are reliant on seasonal workers. It includes but is not limited to the agriculture and tourism industries. We support efforts in Congress to protect this program, however the Department of Labor is making it difficult for employers to use this program effectively. We need to ensure our Representatives in Washington understand how valuable this program is for our members.

### *Business*

The Chamber opposes any legislation that would mandate financial and other requirements on businesses that close down their operations or lay off many employees. One barrier to business ownership is access to capital, especially long-term debt financing. The Billings Chamber of Commerce recognizes that ensuring the availability of financing to foster the growth and expansion of businesses is in the best interest of the economy. The Billings Chamber proposes exploring venture capital fund financial packages through the use of tax credits and tax dollars, to help small Montana businesses.

The Chamber supports and encourages programs and resources that encourage new business expansion and retention, including the network of Small Business Development Centers and the incumbent worker training program as resources that support the needs of our local businesses. We encourage the State to partner with local lending organizations (banks, 504 Loan programs, SBDC, local RLFs) to support the financing needs of start-up and growing businesses.

The Chamber supports passage of legislation that would eliminate the hurdle of “substantial justification” and allow businesses to be reimbursed for attorneys’ fees when successful in challenging government’s regulatory actions in court.

Additionally, the Chamber supports the following:

- Provide businesses with additional time to respond to an OSHA citation, increase the number of OSHA commissioners, allow small businesses the right to appeal an OSHA citation, and force OSHA to pay the legal fees of a business when a citation is overturned.
- Resolve administrative and compliance problems suffered by employers who are making a good faith effort to comply with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and prohibit FMLA expansion to small business.
- Encourage passage of business tax provisions that would provide for the permanency of business expensing allowances (Section 179), the reauthorization of the death tax at a rate the same or lower than the 2009 rate, with the goal of the eventual elimination of the death tax, and the permanent reduction in the marginal income tax rates.
- Work for passage of the Small Business Liability Reform Act, which provides caps on punitive damage awards and proportional liability for small businesses.

### *Immigration*

The Billings Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the U.S. immigration system is broken. To fix the system, a comprehensive approach is needed because it is easier to enforce laws that make sense. Enforcement alone is not the solution. The Chamber supports legislative action that:

- Is comprehensive: addressing both future economic needs for future workers and undocumented workers already in the United States.

- Strengthens national security by providing for the screening of foreign workers and creating a disincentive for illegal immigration.
- Strengthens the rule of law by establishing clear, sensible immigration laws that are effectively and vigorously enforced.
- Creates an immigration system that functions efficiently for employers, workers, and government agencies, which is based on a reliable employment eligibility confirmation system that is easy to use, and will aid businesses with deciphering federal immigration laws so that they can avoid having to hire expensive lawyers.
- Ensures that U.S. workers are not displaced by foreign workers.
- Ensures that all workers enjoy the same labor law protections.

