

Billings Chamber

Public Policy Guide

2017

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BiLLiNGS
Chamber of Commerce



A Message *from* John Brewer *and* Bill Cole



John Brewer
President & CEO

The business community in Billings and the jobs it creates are two of our most important assets. Today this is ever more apparent as states, regions, and nations compete on a global scale for businesses and the talented workforce they employ. Attracting skilled human capital that prefers superior amenities has never been more important as globalization skews the US labor market to favor innovation and creativity. Accordingly, we must make our business climate competitive and our communities attractive to ensure our economy continues to attract the business and talented workforce it requires.

With more than 1,250 member businesses employing over 48,000 Montanans, the Billings Chamber is committed to remaining the voice of the business community and ensuring a favorable economic, legal, and regulatory climate that encourages prosperity and growth. Our mission is to publicly support policies that will facilitate economic growth in our community and produce positive impacts well into the future.

Our 2017 Public Policy Guide was developed to communicate our positions to Chamber members, elected officials, and decision makers. These positions were formulated with essential input from our business community and ultimately approved by our Board of Directors. We ask that you become engaged and help us meet the challenges of a dynamic economy by supporting these positions and moving our community forward.

We look forward to working on these issues and thank you for your support!



Bill Cole
2017 Chairman
Board of Directors

The Billings Chamber's 2017 Public Policy Positions

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Our Priority Issues

Local Option Authority

Support empowering local communities to implement funding solutions that do not further burden property owners and do not require voters to rely on Helena or DC to address their economic development and infrastructure needs.

Support legislation at the state level that authorizes Montana cities to identify and vote on the economic development and quality-of-life projects they need through a limited local sales tax.

ACT
AUTHORIZE
COMMUNITY
TRANSFORMATION

Tourism Funding

Advocate for the 3% portion of bed tax revenue, which is currently deposited into the state's general fund, be reallocated to tourism, tourism regions, and specific tourism bureaus.

Ensure Montana's second largest industry, tourism, is preserved by allocating appropriate funding to tourism infrastructure and organizations responsible for the marketing and promotion of Montana that brings tourists and visitors to our state.



Public Incapacitation

Enhance a city's abilities to address the issue of public incapacitation by authorizing municipal ordinances to deal with people who are incapacitated.

Explore new options for dealing with public incapacitation beyond citations and jail time, such as offering people the choice to enter a rehabilitation program.





Economic Development & Equitable Business Practices

Billings is the economic hub in Montana and in the region. The Billings Chamber of Commerce supports policies that improve our community attractiveness and business climate to help retain and grow companies and workers that are vital to our economic well-being. We believe in a fair tax climate that promotes and develops economic growth through private sector expansion.

Federal Legislative Positions:

- Preserve the right of individuals to **freely own, use and transfer real property** with the ability to pass property from generation to generation without taxation or penalty.

State Legislative Positions:

- Support **local option taxing authority** as a mechanism for augmenting current revenues for local jurisdictions that reduces the need to further burden the property owner.
- Support the ability of local governments to establish **tax increment finance districts, targeted economic development districts, and business improvement districts.**
- Oppose legislation that reduces local government funding by altering **TIF, TEDD, or BID laws.**
- Support reduction of the **business equipment tax** as a key measure to maintain our regional competitiveness.
- Support a competitive insurance market for **workers' compensation**, not dominated by a single insurance carrier or the State Fund.
- Support programs and resources that encourage new and existing **business expansion and retention.**
- Oppose any legislation that mandates substantial increases in **private wage rates.**
- Support clarification and limitations of the **medical marijuana law** to protect businesses' rights.
- Support authorization from the state that would allow cities to institute ordinances giving local law enforcement and the city courts the ability to remove **publicly incapacitated persons** from the streets and into appropriate care.
- Support increasing the number of Yellowstone County **district court judges.**
- Support **tax simplification** at both the state and federal levels.

Local Positions:

- Support multi-use **downtown development** projects as a stimulus for economic growth, private investment and tourism attraction.



Healthcare

The rising cost of healthcare is a significant factor in the ability of businesses to compete in the region, state and world-wide marketplace and to attract the best workforce. Cost containment and transparency efforts should be focused on engaging consumers in healthcare purchasing decisions, improving quality, increasing benefit flexibility and choices, minimizing cost shifting, reforming medical malpractice liability and improved information technology. Providers should be making readily available the cost of procedures to consumers prior to the time of service. Healthcare plays a pivotal role in the economic health in Billings and across the state and throughout the region.

Federal Legislative Positions

- Oppose all efforts to shift the **costs of the uninsured** to businesses, as well as **health insurance mandates** that undermine the ability of employers to provide competitive health insurance at an affordable cost.
- Support equitable reimbursement models for **residency programs** with rural-based learning environments.
- Support equitable distribution of **residency funding**, matching payment rates across the nation.

State Legislative Positions

- Oppose any federal or state changes to **reimbursement levels** that financially harm hospitals, physicians or providers.
- Support ongoing scrutiny, participation and consideration of **medical liability reform** measures.
- Support stable and adequate local and state funding for area **social service programs and facilities**.
- Support adequate reimbursement and expansion of **tele-health services**.
- Support appropriate legislative or community initiatives to address **chronic mental and addiction problems**.
- Support the removal of barriers to access for patients and providers due to **antiquated laws and regulations**.

Local Positions

- Support **employer wellness initiatives** encouraging personal responsibility and enhancing community health awareness.



Infrastructure, Transportation and Development

A strong economy and quality of place are fostered through well-planned community development. The quality of a transportation system, both surface and air, that connects Billings locally and regionally, along with safe and effective infrastructure, is essential for the success of Billings' area businesses in regional and national markets.

Federal Legislative Positions

- Support the continuation of **Essential Air Service** utilizing Billings as the hub.
- Support an **alternative pilot training program** and other effective and safe pathways to increase the number of pilots in the air industry.

State Legislative Positions

- Support state authorization of adequate funding to assist in Montana's, and specifically eastern Montana's, **infrastructure improvements**.
- Support the exploration of various **funding options** such as increased motor fuel tax, dedicated general revenue for new construction and maintenance of our roads and bridges.

Local Positions

- Support subdivision and **zoning regulations** that encourage efficient, orderly development, while allowing flexible and innovative development strategies.
- Support the growth and maintenance of **air service** in Billings.
- Encourage investment in a more diverse **transportation system** that provides viable choices to walk and bike, use public transportation in addition to driving.
- Support a vote of the public on a **county gas tax** to improve infrastructure and trails.
- Support adequate funding that provides for **public safety**.



Workforce and Education

Workforce development and education are intertwined and dependent on the other. The product of a strong education system (kindergarten through higher education) is a productive workforce. Professional growth and training is a lifelong process, benefiting individuals, families, communities and economies.

State Legislative Positions

- Support funding from the general fund to pay for facility upgrades at **Montana State University Billings**.
- Support **Career and Technical Education** funding by increasing general fund allocations.
- Support state funded **worker training** to advance workers to more technical and skilled positions within their companies.
- Support funding for 19 year old students and **mandatory attendance** through age 18.
- Support efforts to improve **education programs** at all levels through choice, innovation and quality assurance.
- Support **employment and training systems** that are based on an accurate and timely labor market analysis.
- Support increasing **education and training funding** at all levels.

Local Positions

- Support policies and curriculum that reduces the **teacher to student ratio**; provides for **technology improvements** and other necessary tools for educational success and higher graduation rates.
- Encourage the **higher education** community to provide programs that meet the talent and development needs of the community (specifically healthcare and energy).

Travel & Tourism

Tourism plays a crucial role in the Billings economy. According to the Institute for Tourism and Recreational Research, non-residents spent more than \$397 million in Yellowstone County in 2014, directly supporting 3,540 jobs. The majority (57%) was spent on retail, restaurants, and hotels, suggesting that people come to Billings for the amenities as well as transiting on to nearby destinations. As a regional hub, Billings also garners significant impacts from in-state travel. Much of Eastern Montana is included in Billings' primary airport catchment area. The meeting and convention market accounts for approximately 25% of all Billings travel business. A 2014 study pinpoints the need to develop modern and larger convention facilities than currently exist.

State Legislative Positions

- Support increased investments in the travel and tourism industry from the **7% state lodging tax**. The **3% general fund lodging tax** should be allocated specifically to tourism promotion and infrastructure.
- Oppose any funding reductions to **local marketing organizations** such as **chambers** and **CVBs**.
- Oppose any attempt to reallocate or increase the lodging facility use tax for any purpose other than **tourism promotion** and **tourism infrastructure**.
- Oppose any reduction or reallocation of the funds generated by current **Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)** laws.
- Support incentives to lure **conventions, groups**, and the **film industry** to the state.

Local Positions

- Support the development of a **convention center** in Billings.
- Support 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.
- Support and encourage operational partnerships in all **publicly owned/operated entertainment facilities** that emphasize, and are consistent with, community goals to develop quality of place while increasing non-resident spending and overnight hotel stays.

Energy, the Environment and Agriculture

The production, processing and distribution of energy create good paying jobs and provide fiscal benefit to the state. For those reasons we support energy development throughout the state, particularly in eastern Montana. Increasing the supply of all energy in Montana (traditional and renewable) will assure affordable and reliable supplies of energy in Montana and across the United States while strengthening our country's energy independence. There is a symbiotic relationship between Ag, Energy and the Environment: it is commonplace to see cattle, sheep, wheat or other crops in the shadow of a wind turbine, power line, refinery or oil well.

Federal Legislative Positions

- Oppose the **Clean Power Plan** due to the harm to state and local governments and because it intrudes on states' authority to oversee their electrical systems.

State Legislative Positions

- Support the growth, enhancement, profitability and efficiencies of **energy operations** and **agribusiness** while protecting the rights of landowners and business owners to operate their business in a competitive environment.
- Support the development of **natural resources** in a manner that is economically viable and environmentally sustainable.
- Support continued operation of **Ag Research Stations** at or greater than the current level of funding in order to attract and retain quality research and personnel.
- Support the continuation of the **Extension Service Programs** at or above current staffing and funding levels.
- Oppose the dilution of **water rights**, which should be reaffirmed and strengthened.
- Support the State of Montana's efforts to develop its own plan for protecting **sage grouse** nesting grounds as long as impacts to agriculture and energy are minimal.

Get Engaged

Connect With Us

Stay informed with what is happening with your Chamber. Sign up for our e-communications at www.billingschamber.com/public-policy. Whether you are looking for legislative updates, tourism information, or business news, the Chamber will keep you connected with the regional business community.

Stay Involved

Join us for Billings Chamber events where the business community engages in discussions related to local option, tourism, workforce, and the Billings economy. We can also present to your staff or service clubs. We encourage you to attend and offer your thoughts and ideas!

Take Action

Your voice is powerful and we encourage you to use it. You can support your Billings business community by contacting your legislators, writing letters to the editor, and engaging in community dialogue in person and online.

Legislative Process

- 1 | Bill is introduced in House or Senate – chamber of origin (1st reading).
- 2 | Bill is assigned to a committee.
- 3 | Bill is heard in committee and (a) passes as is or with amendments, (b) fails by a vote of the committee, or (c) is denied a hearing.
- 4 | Bill returns to the floor for potential amendments and engrossment (2nd reading).
- 5 | Bill passes chamber of origin (3rd reading).
- 6 | Bill repeats the process in second chamber.
- 7 | If all these steps do not occur, the bill dies.
- 8 | If bill completes process without amendment in second chamber, the bill is sent to the Governor.
- 9 | If bill is amended in the second chamber, but its author and a majority of the chamber of origin approve the changes, the bill is sent to the Governor.
- 10 | If the bill's author doesn't agree with the amendments, a conference committee is appointed.
Conferees from both chambers negotiate changes to the bill – if they reach unanimous agreement on a conference report, the report passes the House and Senate Rules Committees and receives a majority vote in both chambers, the bill is sent to the Governor. If all these steps aren't successful, the bill dies.

Key Dates & Deadlines*

Monday, January 2, 2017

First day of 2017 Session

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

Last day to request General Bills & Resolutions

Monday, January 23, 2017

Last day to request Revenue Bills

Tuesday, February 14, 2017

Last day for Committee to request General Bills & Resolutions

Saturday, February 18, 2017

Last day to introduce General Bills

Friday, February 24, 2017

Last day to request Appropriation Bills
Transmittal of General Bills to other chamber

Friday, March 17, 2017

Last day to request Study Resolutions
Transmittal of Revenue-Estimating Joint Resolution

Monday, March 20, 2017

Last day to request Bills Proposing Referendums or for Committee to request Revenue Bills
Last day to introduce Appropriation Bills, Revenue Bills & Bills Proposing Referenda

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Last day to request committee bills to implement HB 2
Transmittal of Appropriation Bills, Revenue Bills, & Proposing Referenda

Saturday, April 1, 2017

Transmittal of amendments to General Bills

Monday, April 10, 2017

Transmittal of amendments to Appropriation Bills, Revenue Bills, & Bills Proposing Referendums

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Transmittal of amendments to Revenue Estimating Joint Resolution

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

Transmittal of Interim Study Resolutions

* Dates are subject to change

Meet *your* Team



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