

Billings Chamber

# Public Policy Guide





**John Brewer**  
President & CEO

## A Message from John Brewer

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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 47,000 Montanans, the Billings Chamber is committed to remaining the voice of the business community and ensuring a favorable economic, legal, and regulatory climate encouraging prosperity and growth. Our business advocacy mission is to lead the community in local, state, and federal issues impacting business and our quality of life.

This 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!

# The Billings Chamber's Public Policy Positions

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## Public Policy Sections

- **Priority Issues - p3**
- **Economic Development & Equitable Business Practices - p6**
- **Health & Wellness - p8**
- **Infrastructure, Transportation & Development - p10**
- **Workforce & Education - p12**
- **Travel & Tourism - p13**
- **Energy, the Environment & Agriculture - p14**

# Priorities

## Economic Development Toolkit

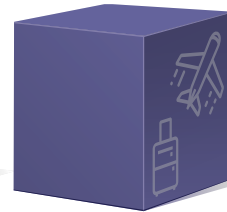
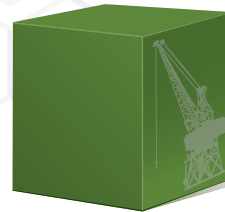
Support empowering local communities to tailor funding solutions to their respective needs. Voters and elected officials at local levels should have more options to raise revenue for the critical infrastructure and quality-of-life investments necessary to building an attractive community where business and residents thrive.

- Support legislation that seeks to broaden the tax base to keep rates low and gives control and authority to local governments and voters, those closest and most responsive to local funding needs.
- Support a voter-approved local sales tax that shifts some tax burden to non-residents.
- Support the use of tax increment finance districts for urban renewal and economic development.
- Support economic development programs such as tax abatement and the “2019 Programs” that lead to more jobs and a stronger economy.
- Support prudent creative solutions to address local funding challenges for the purpose of stimulating investment, increasing wage and job growth, and creating a higher quality-of-life for business and residents.

## Public Safety

Support adequate funding that provides for public safety, including law enforcement, mental health and addiction treatment, and allows for creative solutions at the local level.

- Support a city’s ability to address the issue of public incapacitation by authorizing municipal ordinances to help people who are incapacitated.
- Support the Motivated Addiction Alternative Program to offer addiction counseling to chronic public intoxicated individuals, and working with the County Detention Facility to make extra beds available for the program.



## Tourism Industry Support

Support Montana tourism, the second largest industry, 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.

- 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, for the purpose of funding tourism infrastructure with authority for usage granted at the local level.
- Oppose legislation reducing or eliminating a city's ability to establish a tourism business improvement district.
- Support efforts to ensure short-term rentals that qualify for remittance of the bed tax are doing so.





Rimrock Rd.  
WEST OF DOWNTOWN

Poly Dr.  
Virginia Ln.

AREA OF INFLUENCE

ONE BIG SKY DISTRICT

# FINANCIAL

- 1 - First Interstate Bank
- 2 - Rocky Mountain Bank
- 3 - Stockman Bank
- 4 - US Bank
- 5 - Wells Fargo
- 6 - Western Security Bank
- 7 - Valley Credit Union

# CULTURAL

- 8 - Yellowstone Art Museum
- 9 - Alberta Bair Theater
- 10 - Billings Depot

# HEALTHCARE

- 11 - Billings Clinic
- 12 - Riverstone Health
- 13 - St. Vincent's Healthcare
- 14 - YMCA

# EDUCATION

- 15 - Western Heritage Center
- 16 - MSU Billings
- 17 - McKinley Elementary
- 18 - Rocky Mountain College

# HOTELS

- 19 - Northern Hotel
- 20 - DoubleTree Hotel

# CIVIC BUILDINGS

- 21 - Police Department
- 22 - Federal Courthouse
- 23 - Lincoln Center
- 24 - Billings Public Library

# ADDITIONAL

- 25 - St. Patrick's Cathedral
- 26 - Billings Gazette
- 27 - Sky Point (City Center)
- 28 - Minor League Baseball
- 29 - Local Grocery Store

HEALTH & WELLNESS DISTRICT (MEDICAL CORRIDOR)

LIFESTYLE DISTRICT (DOWNTOWN)

CTA

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BILLINGS

BILLINGS

Billings

Billings

# Economic Development & Equitable Business Practices

Billings is the regional economic hub in Montana. The Billings Chamber of Commerce supports policies that improve our community attractiveness and business climate to help retain and grow employees and companies 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 excessive taxation or penalty.
- Support continued tax simplification.
- Support international trade agreements such as NAFTA, that benefit MT business.

## State Legislative Positions:

- Support continued tax simplification.
- Support re-evaluation and adjustment of state tax structure to reflect our evolving economy.
- Support local option taxing authority as a mechanism for augmenting local jurisdiction revenues and reducing property tax.
- Support the ability of local governments to establish tax increment finance districts, targeted economic development districts, and business improvement districts.
- Support reduction of the business equipment tax as a key measure to maintain our regional competitiveness.
- Support programs and resources that encourage entrepreneurship, new and existing business retention and expansion.
- Support a competitive insurance market for workers' compensation, not dominated by a single insurance carrier or the State Fund.
- Oppose any legislation that mandates substantial increases in private wage rates.
- Support efforts to protect businesses from fraudulent activity.
- Support clarification and limitations of the medical marijuana law to protect businesses' rights.

## Local Positions:

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







# Health and Wellness

Healthcare plays a pivotal role in the economic health of Billings, the state, and throughout the region. While health is more than what we get in a doctor's office, the rising cost of healthcare presents a significant challenge to business and individuals. Cost containment and transparency efforts should focus on engaging consumers in healthcare purchasing decisions, improving quality, increasing health insurance benefit flexibility and choices, minimizing cost shifting, reforming medical malpractice liability and improving information technology. Providers should make information about the estimated price of common procedures readily available to consumers prior to time of service.

## Federal Legislative Positions:

- Oppose efforts to shift the costs of the uninsured to private payers and businesses.

## State Legislative Positions:

- Oppose 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 community social service programs and facilities.
- Support adequate reimbursement and expansion of tele-health services.
- Support appropriate legislative or community initiatives to address behavioral health and substance abuse.
- Support the removal of barriers to accessing healthcare for patients and providers due to antiquated laws and regulations.
- Support authorization from the state that would allow cities to institute ordinances giving local law enforcement and the city courts the ability to remove serial inebriates from the streets and into appropriate care.
- Support the continuation of Medicaid, requiring enrollees to pay premiums and co-pays for certain services as well as the continuation of the voluntary HELPLink workforce development program.
- Support suicide prevention efforts and awareness.
- Support the healthcare industry's right to determine the distribution of their community benefit funds at the local level.

## Local Positions:

- Support employer wellness initiatives encouraging personal responsibility and enhancing community health awareness.
- Support the Motivated Addiction Alternative Program which offers addiction counseling for chronically intoxicated individuals.
- Support adequate public safety funding.



# 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.

## State Legislative Positions:

- Support state authorization of adequate funding to assist in Montana's, and specifically Eastern Montana's, infrastructure improvements to keep pace with 21st Century business demands.
- 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, practical development, while allowing flexible and innovative development strategies.
- Support the growth and maintenance of air service in Billings, including revenue guarantees for expanding service.
- 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.
- Encourage officials involved in the airport remodel to consider the importance of aesthetic appeal, incorporating Billings' unique qualities and culture, and setting our airport apart from competitors.





# Workforce and Education

Workforce development depends on a continuum of professional growth and training that begins in pre-school, continues throughout primary and secondary education, and is ongoing throughout a person's career. Professional growth and training is a lifelong process, benefiting individuals, families, communities and economies. Along with the training and retention of our current workforce, Billings needs to attract more than 2,200 skilled workers in the next year to fill the gap in our workforce shortage. Without a talented pool of workers, our businesses are unable to grow and compete.

## Federal Legislative Positions:

- Support legal immigration that helps provide the talented workforce businesses need, while securing our borders.

## 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 or graduation.
- 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.
- Support increasing tax credits for apprenticeships and work-based learning.

## 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 education community to provide programs that meet the talent and development needs of the community, along with educating students on the diverse employment pathways in Billings.
- Encourage cooperation between the business community and higher education to facilitate more internships.
- Support work-ready community initiatives to help businesses easily identify workers who possess the skills needed for employment.

# Travel & Tourism

Tourism plays a crucial role in the Billings economy. According to the Institute of Tourism and Recreational Research, non-residents spent more than \$305 million in Yellowstone County in 2016, directly supporting 2,630 jobs. Yellowstone County also garners substantial in-state travel totaling 2,067,400 trips and realizing over \$383 million in spending. And Billings' meeting and convention market accounts for approximately 25% of all Billings travel business, but a recent study pinpoints the need to develop modern and larger convention facilities than currently exist to maintain and grow that market.

## Federal Legislative Positions:

- Support funding for National Parks infrastructure as a critical Montana tourism driver.

## State Legislative Positions:

- Support state investment in a regional convention center in Billings that would economically benefit a significant portion of Montana.
- Support increased investments in the travel and tourism industry from the 7% state lodging tax.
- Oppose any funding reductions to local marketing organizations such as tourism regions and Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs).
- Oppose any attempt to reallocate or increase the 4% lodging facility use tax for purposes other than tourism promotion and tourism infrastructure, unless a portion is also returned to tourism. The 3% general fund lodging tax should be allocated specifically to tourism promotion and infrastructure.
- Support efforts to ensure short-term rentals that qualify for remittance of the bed tax are doing so.
- 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, preferably located in downtown, where the data suggest one is most beneficial to 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 public venues, natural, historic, and cultural amenities along with recreational trails.
- 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:

- Support elimination of the Clean Power Plan.

## 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.
- Support funding for rural infrastructure critical to our agriculture community such as roads, bridges, and rural broadband.

## Local Positions:

- Explore opportunities for expanding recycling services including public/private partnerships.

# Get Engaged

The Billings Chamber offers many ways to stay connected with our business community.

## Stay Informed

Visit our website [billingschamber.com/connect-with-us](http://billingschamber.com/connect-with-us), see what's going on, and sign up for our newsletter.

## Come to Events

Please attend our events, network with fellow members, and hear about the great things our chamber community is doing.

## Contact your Officials

We encourage you to contact your officials and make your voice heard. Let them know when they're doing good, as well as when you'd like to see something different. You can easily reach your representatives at: [billingschamber.com/action-center](http://billingschamber.com/action-center).





# 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.

A photograph of the Idaho State Capitol building, a large neoclassical structure with a prominent dome topped by a statue. The building is set against a blue sky with light clouds. In the foreground, there is a green lawn with a circular garden bed containing white flowers. To the right of the building, a tall evergreen tree and some autumn-colored trees are visible. A bronze statue of a person on horseback stands in front of the building. A text box in the upper right corner contains the text "SESSION BEGINS January 7th, 2019".

SESSION BEGINS  
January 7th, 2019

## Meet your Team



**Daniel J. Brooks**

Government Affairs Manager  
daniel@billingschamber.com  
406.869.3733



**Ed Bartlett**

Lobbyist, Billings Chamber  
efbartlett@charter.net

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# it's BillINGS

Chamber of Commerce