

Billings Chamber

Public Policy Guide





John Brewer
President & CEO

A MESSAGE

FROM JOHN BREWER

A strong business community and vibrant economy are the foundations for a high quality of life. In Montana we work hard and play hard. We never take for granted the opportunities provided simply by living where we do. And in order to ensure that we maintain and build upon our quality of life, we need businesses to thrive, our economy to grow, and talented workers to move here.

The Billings Chamber of Commerce is committed to remaining the voice of the business community. Working with elected officials at all levels, we advocate for favorable economic, legal, and regulatory policies that encourage prosperity and growth. We will work to protect what is working well, push for change where it is needed, and offer new ideas to expand the options for addressing the challenges we face.

Our recent experience with Covid-19 reminds us that prosperity is never predetermined or guaranteed. Public policy matters a great deal during normal times and especially so in times of crisis. A healthy workforce is a prerequisite to a healthy economy; as we look toward regaining our collective health and encouraging economic recovery, it is imperative that we reinvigorate our commitment to public health and disaster preparedness.

With our economy facing changes in the wake of Covid-19, we must also acknowledge the changing faces of our business community. Our community faces challenges regarding diversity and inclusion so we are bringing voices together to discuss overcoming those challenges. Because we are early in the process it is unclear what specific policy proposals may be brought forth. We know that if we want to attract the best and brightest while competing with other great destinations in the Mountain West, we must be open for business to ALL.

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 member business community and ultimately approved by our Board of Directors. We ask that you become engaged and help us meet the challenges of today and tomorrow!

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PRIORITIES

MONTANA'S WORKFORCE

*Make our state more
attractive to the next
generation of workforce*

*Invest in education to ensure graduates
are ready to enter the workforce*

*Address gaps in equality
of opportunity for minority
populations*

TAX REFORM

*Reduce the cost of doing
business in Montana*

*Diversify revenue streams to alleviate
dependence on property taxes*

*Optimize our tax structure
and add economic
development tools*

PRIORITIES

PUBLIC SAFETY

Increase public safety resources such as police and fire personnel

Adequately fund mental health and addiction treatment services

Enhance the capacity of the judicial system to efficiently litigate cases





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 open and fair trade policies that benefit MT business.

State Legislative Positions:

- Support continued tax simplification.
- Support reducing regulations that drive up the cost of doing business.
- 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 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 new economic development tools to attract private investment.
- Support clarification and limitations of marijuana laws to protect businesses' rights.
- Support solutions to build more affordable housing in Montana.
- Support safe harbor protections for business regarding Covid exposure.
- Support making permanent the Montana Endowment Tax Credit.

Local Positions:

- Support multi-use development projects as a stimulus for economic growth, private investment and tourism attraction.
- Support the use of tax increment finance funds for appropriate projects.
- Support reducing regulations that drive up the cost of doing business.



HEALTH & 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 and full funding of Medicaid.
- 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 solutions-oriented public safety funding.



INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

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 increasing 5G connectivity throughout Montana.

State Legislative Positions:

- Support state authorization of adequate funding to assist in Montana's infrastructure improvements to keep pace with 21st Century business demands.
- Oppose reductions to the gas tax which funds roads and bridges in Montana.
- Support solutions to increase broadband and 5G connectivity.

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.



WORKFORCE & EDUCATION

Workforce development depends on a continuum of professional growth and training that begins in pre-school, continues through 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. BillingsWorks surveys of Yellowstone County businesses have shown that businesses would like to expand but cannot for lack of workforce. 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 reforming occupational license restrictions and considering eliminating unnecessary licenses.
- Support increasing education and training funding at all levels.
- Support increasing tax credits for apprenticeships and work-based learning.
- Support initiatives to give more local flexibility and consider adjusting school calendars to improve education.
- Support eliminating tax on military retirement income to attract separated veterans ready to start a second career.
- Support improving access to early childhood education and affordable childcare.
- Support clean slate reforms to automatically expunge records of non-violent and low-level offenders who have fulfilled legal obligations without re-arrest or conviction.

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 Recreation Research, non-residents spent more than \$312 million in Yellowstone County in 2019, directly supporting 2,440 jobs. Yellowstone County also garners substantial benefits from the meeting and convention market which accounts for a significant amount of Billings' travel business. However, 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.
- 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 4% general fund lodging tax should be allocated specifically to tourism promotion and local 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.

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, AG & THE ENVIRONMENT

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. 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.

Federal Legislative Positions:

- Support Keystone XL pipeline construction.

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.

DETERMINING

CHAMBER POLICIES

Our mission at the Billings Chamber of Commerce is to develop a strong business climate and vibrant economy by serving the community in a leadership role thereby enhancing the quality of life. With that in mind, we utilize the business expertise within our membership to guide our judgement on what is best for Billings businesses. However, with over a thousand members representing vastly different perspectives, we've necessarily adopted a process that ensures members' voices are taken into account and a board of directors representative of the business community steers our ship.

STEP 1

MEMBERSHIP INPUT

Membership surveys
Conversations with members
1,200 members to consider

STEP 2

ADVISORY BOARDS

11-12 members from various industries
Consider member input & mission
Recommendations to Board of Directors

STEP 3

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

19 leaders from various industries
Consider member input & mission
Approve policy positions

ENGAGE

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

Stay Informed

Visit our website billingschamber.com, see what's going on, and sign up for our newsletter.

Connect

We invite you to attend our in-person and virtual events, network with fellow members, and hear about the great things your 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.



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Event Calendar

APR 1 2021 LEADERSHIP BILLINGS - REGISTRATION

SEP 10 2020 CHAMBER ANNUAL MEETING

SEP 18 2020 CHAMBER AG TOUR

Welcome to the Billings Chamber

CHAMPIONS and CONVENERS
the **CATALYST**
for growth

The Billings Chamber of Commerce is proud to play a role that sparks significant and sustainable changes and inspires possibilities in our growing community. We take on difficult challenges, identify issues, work through the problems and stimulate business.

At our foundational core, we are **Champions** for our community and our members.

As **Conveners**, we create space where people connect and unite.

We are the **Catalyst** that makes important things happen.

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.
- 11 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.

MEET

YOUR TEAM



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