

#15

COMPLETE

Time Spent: Over a week  
Email: bryan@nvs.org

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Page 1: Introduction

**Q1** Please provide your name.

Bryan Stafford

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Page 2

**Q2** Why are you running for State Legislature?

I am running for the Montana senate to provide a common sense, fact based alternative to the heavily partisan platforms that have been taking Montana in the wrong direction for some time now.

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**Q3** What do you believe is the most important issue related to growing business in Billings and what are your suggestions for addressing that issue?

Senate district 27, the district I'm running in, is made up mostly unincorporated Yellowstone County and includes far west Billings and northeast Laurel so I would be representing the concerns of Billings as well as these other areas. Given this, I support solutions that would bolster the greater Billings area as well as the city of Billings itself. I believe the item at the top of the list is providing community services and an inclusive atmosphere that attract people and corporations. People have a choice as to where they want to settle and they are more likely to settle somewhere that is welcoming and has attractive community facilities and services such as parks, bike and running trails, up to date recreation facilities (like what is currently under study by the South Billings Urban Renewal Association and city council), concerts, art, theatre, restaurants, night life, good airport, convention center, etc... If we want people to choose the Billings area over other Montana communities, we need to continue to improve and make it the obvious choice among the other options in Montana.

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**Q4** In the 2017 Legislative Session, local option authority was supported by the Billings Chamber, City of Billings, Big Sky Economic Development, Downtown Billings Partnership, and numerous other organizations across the state. Under what conditions would you vote for a local option authority bill?

Cities should be able to chart their own course when it comes to local option authority. Montana is extremely tourist heavy but we as of yet haven't been very good at tapping into that potential revenue stream. I would like to see programs that would target that demographic and the services they use in order to provide relief to local residents who are tired of seeing their obligations steadily increase.

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## Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

**Q5** Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts are an important economic development tool for our community. How will you work to ensure one of local government's most useful funding mechanisms is preserved?

First off, my wife and I own a business that has benefited from TIF funding and I have seen many other business that have done so as well. But the businesses aren't the only benefactors. I would argue that the community as a whole is the main beneficiary since these funds serve to enhance projects that enrich and invigorate the target area bringing in more people and more potential customers for all local businesses. I whole heartedly agree with the TIF concept and would oppose any legislation that would seek to curtail TIF availability and effectiveness.

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**Q6** In 2016, Yellowstone County hoteliers remitted \$3.5 million in facility use taxes to the state. That year our regional Convention & Visitors Bureau, which markets and promotes our area as a travel destination, received \$350,000 (just 10%) from the state to market and promote tourism in our area. Will you work with the Billings Chamber and lodging partners to ensure more money is returned to the areas generating lodging tax revenue? (Y/N) **Yes**

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**Q7** MSU Billings is an essential economic driver for our community and surrounding area. Not only does MSU Billings provide educational opportunity for Montanans, it also assists with workforce development, an increasingly important challenge facing our community. How will you help to ensure MSU Billings receives adequate funding for facility updates?

The availability of rigorous educational opportunities is a major enhancement to a community's attractiveness. I further believe that, as the largest city in Montana by a wide margin, MSU Billings should have a much larger roll in Montana's university system. Certainly, this is not an easy issue that will be solved in the short term and it further presents somewhat of an "chicken/egg" problem, i.e. we need the programs to attract the students but we need the student base in order to provide the programs. I believe we need to continue to lobby the Regents for our fair share of Montana's university system along with pursuing grants from the Coal Board and other entities and, if elected, will work toward the goal of ensuring MSU Billings receives the funding necessary to grow the available programs and provide resources for Yellowstone County residents to more readily attend.

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**Q8** The Billings Chamber, City of Billings, Big Sky Economic Development, Downtown Billings Partnership, and other community partners, are working with Hammes Co. on the development of One Big Sky Center, comprised of two development districts and anchored by a regional convention center. If a state funding source were identified and developed, under what conditions would you support the inclusion of state monies in the funding mix for a regional convention center in Billings?

The One Big Sky Center project is exciting but also somewhat problematic in that, as currently structured, it might over utilize funds that could otherwise be used to help more small businesses in the downtown Billings area. I believe the only way this project should proceed is with more private and possible state funding. I would like to see some realistic projections of the economic impact that this project would provide and, if warranted, support state funding based on the idea that this project would pay for itself in a reasonable period of time.

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## Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

**Q9** Sixteen percent of Billings workers are employed in the healthcare arena resulting in a total direct and indirect economic output of \$2.6 billion annually. Do you believe that cutting state reimbursement to hospitals, clinics and other healthcare providers is a way to address state budget shortfalls? (Y, N)

**No,**

You may provide additional context if appropriate.:

However, given the budget passed by the previous legislature, it is unrealistic to think that the shortfalls could not have been made up without cutting some of these reimbursements.

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**Q10** Throughout the legislative interim and November 2017 Special Session the re-evaluation of Montana's funding mechanisms was a topic of discussion. What are your thoughts on the need to identify new revenue sources to address a shifting economy and our infrastructure needs?

Tourist visitation data shows that we residents of Montana are vastly outnumbered by nonresident tourists for much of the year. The logical choice for generating additional revenue and providing relief to the citizens of Montana would be to look toward ways of having these visitors fund a greater share of the services they use. I would strongly support ideas that target this demographic in order to lessen the burden currently born almost entirely by Montana residents.

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**Q11** Billings, and the greater Yellowstone County area, has the largest legislative delegation in the state and there is great potential to work together toward regional specific initiatives. How do you plan to work with all members of the Yellowstone County area delegation for the betterment of our business community during the 2019 Legislative Session?

I am a very pragmatic person and make decisions based on facts, common sense and, logic. I believe as a representative of the citizens of Yellowstone County, I would be charged with listening to all of the various viewpoints and base decisions on the best ideas, regardless of who brings them to the table. The legislature should be viewed as a team effort, not as an "us against them" fight. Consensus is the name of the game and that's what I'm committed to.

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Page 3: Finalizing Questionnaire

**Q12** If you have not sent the Billings Chamber a high-res image you would like us to use, please upload a photo here.

**Pic\_headshot.jpg (638.9KB)**

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