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Page 1: Introduction

Q1 Please provide your name.

Danny Choriki

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Q2 Why are you running for State Legislature?

We are living through an intense period of rapid social and economic change driven by technological changes that are unprecedented in human history. Because of these changes, many if not all of us, look to the future with uncertainty, even trepidation, if not outright fear. These fears are not baseless. I strongly believe that we must confront these fears and calmly look past them to the core causes of the actual problems we are facing. It is only then that we can find solutions that will work. I firmly believe that policy needs to be examined in terms of results. We should examine legislation regularly to see if it has had the desired outcomes and if not, either fix them or end them. But the first step is to face our fears. The core of my platform is that we need to stop shouting at each other and start listening to each other. We all want to take care of our families and our friends and neighbors. That is the core of Montana values. For Montana to make this happen for all Montanans, we must listen and act deliberately. Why am I running for the State Legislature? Because we need to start talking rationally about solutions instead of reacting to our fears.

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?

A vision for the future based on more than constant annexation and more importantly a willingness to execute said vision for the future. We are faced with the likelihood of consistent growth and the current vision being executed is for more sprawl and the incumbent real costs to The City of Billings and to the daily lives of its residents. Any urban planner will tell you that a city needs areas of mixed, high density use. The current One Big Sky approach tying downtown to the medical centers and the areas of higher learning is a good step towards a vision for the center of Billings. In 2006, The City of Billings undertook a study of the Heights and recommended a heights based business improvement district and related tax increment financing district. Implementing those recommendations would go a long way towards providing the Heights with a coherent vision for development and the ability to implement that vision. These steps are what made One Big Sky a possibility downtown. The citizens and leaders of Billings need to make some hard decisions about where and how Billings is to grow. The first step is that annexation on the whims of developers needs to stop. Growth needs to be guided towards a longer-term vision. That vision needs to include areas within Billings that are vibrant because they encourage pedestrian traffic, multiple uses across days of the week and times of the day. Sprawl has its advantages, but thriving business requires thriving commercial zones which require density and mixed use. There are many other related issues. But a coherent vision of a thriving city driven by connected economic centers is a vital first step towards an economic and social climate where businesses, large and small, can thrive.

Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

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?

The recently proposed bill is fine. I personally think there are too many conditions already imposed in recent attempts, but I understand the political process driving the changes. Cities are the economic engines that drive well being for a region. Many people who do not live in those cities and do not contribute, still benefit. Local option authority helps cities control their own economic destiny by charging everyone their fair share for services rendered.

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?

I will support legislation that aims to make them more responsive and flexible to the needs of diverse areas. I do not believe that blight is the correct point in which they should be invoked. If we wait for blight, then we have waited too long. I will resist legislation or regulations that aim to restrict or eliminate this necessary tool for economic development.

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,

You may provide additional context if appropriate.:

Yes, I believe that the money currently going to the general fund should be clawed back and used to promote both state and local tourism. There should be an economic model in place which evaluates the effectiveness of the use of these funds and helps to inform future investments. I also believe that more of these funds should be available to assist in the development of projects which enable tourism particularly around bicycle and pedestrian traffic. People who walk in your community are more likely to shop in your community.

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?

I am willing to work with the MSUB Foundation, Alumni Association and The City of Billings to do what ever is necessary to upgrade our academic facilities and resources. (Or any other supporter of education.)

Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

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?

First, let me state that I am a strong proponent of regional planning. Willard Fraser considered himself the mayor of Billings and the 300 miles surrounding Billings. I certainly agree with the sentiment. Billings as a regional center, is in competition with neighboring cities for people who are looking to build a life and the dollars which provide the soil in which those lives can grow. I fully support actions that support looking at areas in Montana in terms of regional development. Among those actions would be regional planning and funding sources for development projects with regional impact. Funding would not be limited to state resources as I would look for regional solutions as well.

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.:

No. I do not look at government budgets as if they are check books that need to be balanced. Should Montana run a balanced budget, yes. It is up to legislators to make those types of hard decisions. However, one of the important reasons for government spending in areas such as providing health care is that it provides the direct benefit of jobs (and skilled well-paying jobs at that). In short, cutting taxes, to cut spending, also cuts jobs. Montanans are still waiting for the trickle-down effects of the 1986 tax cuts. Legislators need to look at how money flows through an economy and not just a balanced checkbook.

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?

Montanans though their legislative representatives need to be envisioning what we want Montana's economy to look like for our children and our grandchildren. Having cut my policy teeth as a libertarian, I am always interested in finding funding sources that derive directly from those who benefit from the funded policies. I had hoped back in the 1970s when we passed the Coal Severance Tax that Montanans had learned the lessons of corporate greed from our experience with the Anaconda Company. Watching the agony over the end of the Coalstrip power plants, something that many of us predicted in the 1970s, I have to wonder. The Coal Severance Tax Trust Fund should have been and can still be used to fund economic development that diversifies the economic base of towns like Coalstrip. An investment into clean energy jobs would seem to be a obvious place to begin as the power distribution network is in place. Beyond energy, Montanans have a unique pension for making things with our hands. Having worked to support startups and small businesses across the State, I have met several people whose "hobby" could, with the right support, turn into a comfortable revenue stream. We need to find ways to support and enable these entrepreneurs. It is also obvious that the changing climate will impact agriculture and tourism. The State of Montana needs to take a leading role in minimizing the economic impact that changes in rainfall and growing season will have on key industries. I firmly believe that state government can, no, must play a vital role in helping to shape the future of Montana's economy.

Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

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 strongly feel that many people see economics as a zero-sum game, that if one person benefits over there, then someone else has to suffer over here. Considering that assumption, the need to protect what I have become very strong, especially during perceived times of economic distress. I get that and can respect the feeling. I would begin by challenging the notion that economics is a zero-sum game. While there are transactions with clear winners and losers, economics should be viewed as more than transactions. Economics should be viewed as how goods and services flow through a society as facilitated by money. A \$20 bill that changes hands 10 times in a day enabled \$200 worth of goods and services and enriched the lives of at least 10 people. So the conversation begins here. I believe that we are all looking to take care of those who are close to us, our families, friends and neighbors. The conversation isn't about whether or not we take care of each other, but how we take care of each other. I will have coffee with anyone, I will facilitate meetings, I will consider any perspective, I will honor any proposal. In the end, we need to be talking to each other to find the common ground from which we can see and plan for the future of Montana.

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.

Corporate Headshot Danny Choriki.jpg (50KB)
