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COMPLETE

Time Spent: Over a day
Email: emmaformontana@gmail.com

Page 1: Introduction

Q1 Please provide your name.

Emma Kerr-Carpenter

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Q2 Why are you running for State Legislature?

I've decided to run for the legislature because mental health services and many other services that provide essential care for the most vulnerable Montanans were drastically defunded during our last legislature. I believe that ensuring a dignified and stable standard of living and care for all is our baseline obligation to our fellow Montanans. Fully funding mental health services and quality education is a critical start, but we must also find creative ways to go beyond the bare minimum.

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?

The most important issue related to growing a business in Billings is attracting and retaining a high quality workforce with solid decision making, problem solving and critical thinking skills. As one of those people who came to Billings from out of state and decided to stay, I feel I can speak pretty authoritatively about what will attract and keep people here. I came here as a volunteer in a program similar to Americorps. I like to say that I did not choose Billings, but that Billings chose me. I had the pleasure of living in the heart of downtown two blocks from Pioneer Park. My first summer in Billings was shaped by events such as Symphony in the Park, the Farmer's Market, Alive After 5, and pick-up kickball games. The vibrancy of Billings was infectious that summer. We need to continue to build and support the placemaking initiatives, including the ones I listed above and others such as public art and the many trail projects that capitalize on the natural features of our city. However, these are just the "frosting." People decide to stay in a place for other reasons than just the amenities a community offers. If we are serious about attracting and retaining quality workers then we also need to address the dearth of affordable, high-quality housing and daycare options and the quality of our schools at large.

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 local option authority as outlined in SB331 from 2017 Legislative session answers many of my concerns. I am in favor of the bill because of the property tax relief and the 5% withholding to reimburse local business administration costs. This lessens the impact on my constituents and neighbors who worry about rising property taxes, and will hopefully incentivize businesses to support local option authority. Additionally, the bill does not tax the “necessities of life.” I appreciate that it will not unduly burden working families with an extra tax.

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?

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) districts are an elegant tool that has greatly benefited Billings over the past 20 years. The Downtown TIF district has helped transform downtown Billings into the place that I am proud to make my home. I will work to ensure that we preserve this tool by being vigilant against measures that might seek to hobble TIF districts such as measures that require awardees of TIF funds pay them back.

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**

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?

It is time for MSU Billings to be treated like the flagship school that it can and should be in Montana. The school needs to be allowed to be responsive to the needs of the community. I will advocate for no strings attached funding like that given to Montana’s other flagship institutions in Bozeman and Missoula. I am in favor of measures that create stronger relationships with local businesses and research groups and I will advocate for measures that will make going to MSU Billings an affordable choice for young people seeking a high quality university 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?

The One Big Sky Center project (OBSC) could benefit Billings and Eastern Montana for years to come. I am aware that a substantial portion of OBSC sits in HD 49. I like the current plan for OBSC better than the original plan that was put forward. I appreciate the care and craft put into the vision for Billings from the hospital corridor to the downtown entertainment district put forward by the Hammes Co., but continue to be concerned about the effects of the inevitable rise in property taxes created by this project and the potential for displacing long-term residents of surrounding neighborhoods (i.e, South and North Sides). I would want to work closely with the City of Billings and other organizations to maximize the project's local benefit. I would support state money for the upfront development of OBSC with two conditions, which I believe enhance the project's benefits and attractiveness to political constituencies within and beyond Billings. 1) The facilities at OBSC should procure goods and services from locally-owned businesses wherever possible. This policy would ensure that dollars coming into Billings through OBSC have the widest possible circulation and impact within our regional economy, enhancing the economic benefit to Billings and the region. 2) Buildings should be constructed to high-performance standards, including those that go above and beyond current code, such as efficient lighting, heating, cooling, insulation, appliances, and plumbing. Building OBSC to high-performance standards would lower operating costs by conserving resources and would improve the financial sustainability of the business in the face of unpredictable occupancy rates. Convention centers often don't operate at a profit and require ongoing support to remain viable. I would consider supporting an operating subsidy for OBSC if it would provide a reasonable rate of return in terms of tax revenue.

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**

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?

Montana needs to start shifting to a new model and mix of funding to pay for the things that we need, including current services that demand increased levels of funding. We have a unique opportunity to be a leader in the country and Billings is set to lead the state. I am in support of measures that raise additional revenue. We should eliminate tax loopholes and deductions and increase the tax rate paid by those in the highest income brackets, including part-time residents of Montana. We should also increase other existing taxes, such as the severance taxes on fossil fuel extraction. We should enact Local Option Authority to give cities and counties more local options for increasing their tax base. We should also explore an internet sales tax and novel taxes on alcohol, carbonated beverages, and non-essential packaging (i.e. Colorado). I also support a cap-and-dividend approach to capturing public revenue from in-state carbon emissions.

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 have been giving this a lot of thought. I think my first task would be to sit down with each member of the Yellowstone County area delegation individually. I would hope that during these meetings I can establish a base of trust and mutual congeniality. By building a relationship with my fellow delegates, I hope I can learn from them and share my insights. I hope that we would be able to find common ground on our mutual love for the place and people we represent. My agenda is that, no matter what happens, we do what is best for Billings.

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.

Head Shot Cropped.png (11.4MB)
