

Billings Chamber

# Public Policy Guide





**John Brewer**  
President & CEO

## A MESSAGE

FROM  
JOHN BREWER

A strong business community leads to a vibrant economy, which is the foundation for a high quality of life. Businesses of all sizes are facing challenges today that they have either never faced before or have not faced in many years: inflation, supply chain bottlenecks, worker shortages, crime, the lingering effects of the pandemic, and instability in governance at home and abroad. There is no group better suited to rise to the occasion than the Billings business community. These challenges are opportunities for growth.

We need to attract talented workers to fill our existing vacancies and assist business growth. Some of those new residents will look and think like our existing population; others will bring new perspectives and welcomed diversity. We must ensure that our community welcomes these differences. Additionally, even the most welcoming community cannot attract workers if there is no place for them to live. The housing affordability crisis looms so large, we cannot afford to turn down new housing projects.

We would like to thank Billings voters for their overwhelming support of the 2021 Public Safety Mill Levy, adding police, fire fighters, legal staff, and other resources to address public safety needs in our community. Plenty of work remains to solve our public safety problems, both in spending those new funds judiciously, but also in finding new solutions to old problems. At both the state and local level, we must find ways to reduce recidivism and address the root causes of addiction, homelessness, and mental health crises.

Finally, we are long overdue for an alternative to continually asking property owners to pay more for necessary public services. The Billings Chamber has long held that the legislature must trust their voters and authorize local option taxing authority, voted on by the residents and including property tax relief. Updating our tax code to reflect a changing economy and adding economic development tools to incentivize private investment will catalyze growth and propel us into a brighter future.

It has long been said of business that if one is not moving forward, they are falling behind—the same applies to our city, county, and state. To the extent that government is part of the solution, we believe that the policy positions contained within this guide are our roadmap to success. These positions were formulated with essential input from our business community and ultimately approved by our Board of Directors. This Public Policy Guide was developed to communicate our positions to Chamber members, elected officials, and the public, and it will serve as our guide as we convene leaders to find solutions, champion our members at all levels of government, and find catalysts for growth. We look forward to working together to solve our challenges and work toward a brighter future.

# Table of Contents

- **Priority Issues**..... **pg. 3**
- **Business Issues**..... **pg. 6**
- **Workforce & Education**..... **pg. 8**
- **Travel & Tourism** ..... **pg. 10**
- **Quality of Life**..... **pg. 11**
- **Agriculture**..... **pg. 12**
- **Health & Wellness**..... **pg. 13**
- **Natural Resources & Environment** ..... **pg. 14**
- **Infrastructure & Transportation** ..... **pg. 15**

## PRIORITIES

# MONTANA'S WORKFORCE

*Address affordable housing  
by increasing incentives  
and reducing barriers*

*Invest in and reform education to ensure  
graduates are ready for the workforce*

*Create a welcoming city  
with a high quality of life  
to attract diverse talent*

# TAX REFORM

*Reduce the cost of doing  
business in Montana*

*Diversify revenue streams to alleviate  
dependence on property taxes*

*Protect and add economic  
development tools to incent  
private investment*

## PRIORITIES

# PUBLIC SAFETY

*Find ways to reduce recidivism  
and equitably distribute  
parolees throughout MT*

*Evaluate incarceration facilities to  
ensure adequate capacity for existing  
and future needs*

*Adequately fund mental  
health, addiction, and  
homelessness services*







# BUSINESS ISSUES

The Billings Chamber of Commerce supports policies that improve our business climate, promote a vibrant economy, and lead to a high quality of life. We believe that the private sector is generally more efficient than government, and government decisions should be made at the local level whenever possible. We support broadening the tax base to keep rates low, simplifying the tax code, and diversifying revenue streams to alleviate property tax burdens.

## We Support

- 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.
- Continued tax simplification.
- Reducing unnecessary regulations that drive up the cost of doing business and implementing necessary regulations in a user-friendly fashion.
- Programs and resources that encourage entrepreneurship, new and existing business retention, and expansion.
- Multi-use development projects as a stimulus for economic growth, private investment and tourism attraction.
- A pattern of development that enables and encourages the most efficient possible use of taxpayer funds.
- Local option taxing authority as a mechanism for augmenting local revenues and reducing property tax.
- Creating new economic development tools to incentivize private investment and economic growth.
- Innovative funding and financing mechanisms.
- Open and fair trade policies that provide businesses broad access to markets.
- Utilizing tax increment finance funds for appropriate projects.
- Reforming liquor licensing laws in a manner that is equitable to existing license holders.

## We Oppose

- The removal or narrowing of existing economic development tools.
- Burdensome increases in the minimum wage.





## # Better off in Billings

friendly  
firms  
to affc.

Diverse economy  
Service (oil/gas)  
Out doors  
↓ cost to start  
Business



# WORKFORCE & EDUCATION

As our business community thrives and grows, Billings must grow as well. We support policies that will help local businesses attract the talented workers they need to fill their vacancies and expand their operations. In the long term, our education system plays a critical role in readying the next generation of citizens, workers, and business owners. We support policies that create a positive and effective learning environment for students at all levels.

## We Support

- Creating incentives to build more housing in Montana and removing barriers to development.
- Legal immigration that helps provide the talented workforce businesses need, while securing our borders.
- Cooperation between education institutions and businesses to facilitate internships.
- Efforts to improve education programs at all levels through choice, innovation, and quality assurance.
- Improving access to early childhood education and affordable childcare.
- Funding for pre-school, K-12 schools, career technical education, and higher education.
- Clean slate reforms to automatically expunge records of non-violent and low-level offenders who have fulfilled legal obligations without re-arrest or conviction.
- Eliminating tax on military retirement income to attract separated veterans ready to start a second career.
- Increased worker training through increased tax credits for apprenticeships and work-based learning, and state funded worker training programs.



# TRAVEL & TOURISM

More than 2.6 million people visit Billings annually spending \$621 million every year (Destination Analysts). Bringing more guests to the state and community benefits all local businesses, supporting thousands of jobs and fostering economic growth. The Billings Chamber believes in policies that will help promote Montana, Billings, and Southeast Montana as tourism destinations, and allow businesses to reap the full benefits of those visitors.

## We Support

- State investment in a regional convention center in Billings, preferably in downtown, that would economically benefit a significant portion of Montana.
- Federal funding for National Parks infrastructure as a critical Montana tourism driver.
- Demand-generating infrastructure and programs to bring visitors, athletes, companies, and conventions to Billings while enhancing our quality of life as residents. These infrastructure amenities include public venues, natural, historic, and cultural amenities along with recreational trails.
- Efforts to ensure all publicly owned entertainment facilities are most effectively managed, providing exceptional quality of place, increasing non-resident spending, and using taxpayer dollars wisely.

## We Oppose

- Any reduction or reallocation of the funds generated by current Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) laws.
- Any funding reductions to local marketing organizations such as tourism regions and Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs).
- 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.

# QUALITY OF LIFE

A strong business climate and a high quality of life cannot exist independent from one another; public safety, recreation opportunities, and other amenities are crucial for attracting the workers existing businesses need to grow as well as new businesses. We believe in policies that will make our community attractive to people regardless of race, sex, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression.

## We Support

- Continual evaluation of public safety spending to ensure efficient use of funds.
- Evaluating incarceration facilities to ensure adequate capacity for current and future needs.
- Adequate funding for parks, trails, and other amenities.
- Increasing cooperation between state and local governments to reduce crime.
- Policies and initiatives to reduce recidivism among those exiting incarceration.
- Increased oversight for sober living houses to ensure positive outcomes for residents.
- Efforts to distribute parolees equitably throughout the state.
- State reimbursement to local incarceration facilities for the full cost of housing state inmates.
- Efforts to combat human trafficking.
- Continued use of treatment courts and Motivated Addiction Alternative Program.
- Innovation, cooperation, and funding to address homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, and addiction issues.
- Policies to create a welcoming community for a more diverse population that:
  - Prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, or public accommodation on the basis of race, color, religion or creed, national origin or ancestry, sex (including gender, pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity), age, physical or mental disability, veteran status, genetic information, citizenship, or any other federally protected class.
  - Comply with existing federal/state law.
  - Do not create undue burdens on businesses.
  - Allow religious organizations to limit employment or give preference in employment to members of the same religion.



# AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the bedrock of our local economy, and it is an irreplaceable part of our history. Urban businesses in Yellowstone County succeed when rural ag businesses succeed. We believe in policies that give agricultural producers, and the businesses that support them freedom, access, and capital they need to thrive.

## We support

- Protecting senior water rights.
- Limited federal regulation over established navigable bodies of water.
- Management of wildlife at the state level of government, including sage grouse and predators.
- Trade policies that provide agricultural producers access to foreign markets.
- Increasing the ease of movement of agricultural commodities across state lines.
- Broad-based tax reform to make Montana more competitive for agricultural business investment and job creation.
- Funding and initiatives to expand meatpacking, processing, and rendering facilities.
- Efforts to increase livestock price discovery and competition.
- Preserving multiple use on public lands.
- Programs and initiatives that add value to local ag products.
- Funding for the development of rural infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and rural broadband including 5G.
- Extension Service Programs continuing at or above current staffing and funding levels.
- 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.
- An equitable balance between the customer's right to repair and the rights of the manufacturer/dealer.

# HEALTH & WELLNESS

Quality healthcare is a prerequisite to a vibrant, healthy community. Pricing in healthcare should be affordable, transparent, and fair; bringing more market forces to the healthcare industry and allowing providers to adapt to new technologies will improve outcomes for everyone. We believe in policies that improve access to, and quality of, care while encouraging patients to make better, more informed decisions.

## We support

- Reducing barriers to access healthcare for patients and providers.
- Stable and adequate local and state funding for community social service programs and facilities.
- Continued and full funding of Medicaid.
- Ongoing scrutiny, participation, and consideration of medical liability reform measures.
- Adequate reimbursement and expansion of tele-health services.
- Employer wellness initiatives encouraging personal responsibility and enhancing community health awareness.
- Mental health and suicide prevention efforts and awareness.
- The healthcare industry's right to determine the distribution of their community benefit funds at the local level.

## We oppose

- Efforts to shift the costs of the uninsured to private payers and businesses.
- Federal or state changes to reimbursement levels that financially harm hospitals, physicians or providers.
- Invasive regulations over physician/patient interactions.

# NATURAL RESOURCES & THE ENVIRONMENT

Montana is rich both in opportunities to extract the raw materials needed to fuel the economy and in natural beauty that attracts tourists and improves residents' lives. Finding ways to take full advantage of our natural resources while preserving the environment is key to our long-term prosperity. We believe in policies that allow Montanans to harvest resources and produce energy while preserving the environment for the next generation.

## We support

- The development of natural resources in a manner that is economically viable and environmentally sustainable.
- Maintaining and increasing Montana energy production, keeping energy affordable.
- Initiatives to ensure U.S. energy independence.
- Policies that encourage all forms of energy production, including reliable baseload power.
- The development of infrastructure projects to move energy resources safely and efficiently.
- Initiatives to allow stakeholders to vindicate legal rights without completely halting development.
- Exploring opportunities for expanding recycling services including public/private partnerships.
- Exploring opportunities to bring new green energy industries to Billings.
- Efforts to modernize and strengthen Montana's energy grid to improve reliability.
- Continued efforts to increase efficiency in City operations and pursue higher levels of LEED certification.
- Climate change policies that:
  - Utilize market forces to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
  - Allow businesses and consumers flexibility in meeting targets.
  - Invest in new technologies.
  - Maintain energy reliability.
  - Give businesses long-term certainty needed to make rational decisions.
  - Address the problem at a federal and global level.

## We oppose

- Policies designed to slow or prevent the development of an innovative green energy business sector.

# INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

Quality infrastructure provides businesses with access to markets and provides a foundation for development and expansion. In today's economy, internet connections are arguably just as important as asphalt. We support adequate funding, exploring new funding mechanisms, and a regulatory environment necessary to build a sustainable and resilient infrastructure system.

## We support

- Adequate funding for Montana's infrastructure improvements to keep pace with 21st Century business demands.
- Solutions to increase broadband and 5G connectivity.
- Regulatory reforms to reduce red tape that increases the cost of building infrastructure and delays projects.
- Legal reforms to prevent litigation from unduly delaying construction.
- Subdivision and zoning regulations that encourage efficient, practical development, while allowing flexible and innovative development strategies.
- Investment in a more diverse transportation system that provides viable choices to walk and bike, use public transportation, or travel by rail, in addition to driving.
- The continuation of Essential Air Service utilizing Billings as the hub.
- The growth and maintenance of air service in Billings, including revenue guarantees for expanding service.
- Maintaining the gas tax, which funds roads and bridges in Montana.
- An appropriate user fee for electric vehicles, commensurate with taxes paid by the average gasoline motorist, allocated to road maintenance.



# ENGAGE

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

## Stay Informed

Visit our website [billingschamber.com](https://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 find a list of your representatives at [billingschamber.com/public-policy](https://billingschamber.com/public-policy).



[Become a Member](#) - [Priorities](#) [Leadership Billings](#) [NextGEN](#) [Membership Directory](#) [Events](#) - [Get Involved](#) - [Jobs](#) -

### Shop Local Support Billings

Support your favorite businesses! Check out these meaningful ways you can support our local small businesses.

[LEARN MORE](#) ▶

1 2 3 4 5 6



[BECOME A MEMBER](#)

[PUBLIC POLICY](#)

[ABOUT THE CHAMBER](#)

[VISIT](#)

[RELOCATE](#)

[CONNECT](#)

### 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



**Daniel J. Brooks**

Business Advocacy Director  
daniel@billingschamber.com  
406.869.3733



**Jack Jennaway**

Business Advocacy Coordinator  
jack@billingschamber.com  
406.869.3736



## BUSINESS ADVOCACY

## SPONSORS



**Century 21 Hometown Brokers - Julie Seedhouse**  
**MSU Billings Foundation**

# it's BillINGS

Chamber of Commerce

[billingschamber.com](http://billingschamber.com)

**Billings Chamber of Commerce**

815 S. 27th St., Billings, MT 59101 | 406.245.4111

