

#7

COMPLETE

Time Spent: 00:48:56

Email: jmerecki@outlook.com

Page 1: Introduction

Q1 Please provide your name.

Jennifer Merecki

Page 2

Q2 Why are you running for State Legislature?

Senate in District 22

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?

Growing businesses face a range of challenges. As a business grows, different obstacles and opportunities demand different solutions. What worked a year ago might now be not the best approach. Business conditions change continually, so your market research should be continuous as well. Otherwise you run the risk of making business decisions based on out-of-date information. Billings needs to stay current on market trends and community involvement is essential. Find out what the citizens wish they had and as you build it "they will come". It is important to be cognizant and plan ahead with an open mind. Good cash flow control is important for any business. For a growing business, it's crucial - cash constraints can be the biggest factor limiting growth, with that, I would like to see more incentives for small business development in the Billings area. I would like to introduce good problem solving seminars and opportunities for existing and new businesses. A disciplined approach to management focuses on leading employees, developing your management team and building your business strategy. Instead of treating each problem as a one-off, you develop systems and structures that make it easier to handle in the future. With this, business can exist and grow to contribute to the city for the long term. Also, encouraging and welcoming change is essential. Local and widespread promotion that encourages new types of business will add to the success of a vibrant business community.

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?

One condition would be that a local-option tax proceeds must go for reduced property taxes for residential and commercial property. We need to have a local option that would benefit the citizens by taxing things like hotels. Tourism is huge in Montana and we need to have some option to have the visitors pay for the use of our infrastructure.

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?

TIFs can be rather complicated, but they are an important weapon in a city's arsenal for fighting urban decay. A city is not free to slap the TIF label on any property it wants, and what constitutes "blight" is specifically defined in the TIF statute. If an area does not meet the definition of blight under the statute, the city will not be able to create a TIF there. I will fight for improving our city and using the TIF money wisely.

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?

I will help promote legislation that will provide college funding for facilities and also student recruitment. Providing affordable tuition is essential for the overall success of MSUB

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?

I would allow state monies to support the Center on the condition it could be proven the Big Sky Center would reach out to other communities with opportunities that would benefit those communities, such as discount rates for Montana businesses for events and meetings. If state money was used, the Center would have to benefit statewide

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.:
Cutting anything in healthcare damages it citizens. We have a moral obligation to care for Montanans. We should not be reducing funding to any healthcare provider. We need healthy communities to keep a workforce in full swing and businesses open from the revenue generated from healthcare wages.

Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

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?

We need to look at properly anticipating revenue to begin with. Inflating numbers for face value to then be used to cut other services for balance is unacceptable. I believe we need to shift to open-minded opportunities and not leave stones unturned.

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 genuinely believe there is always room for inclusion and collaboration. We may not always see eye-to-eye but one thing is clear, we all want what is best for Billings and Yellowstone County and there are cordial ways to make that happen.

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.

Jennifer ED.jpg (1.6MB)
