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COMPLETE

Time Spent: Over a week  
Email: jessica.karjala@gmail.com

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Page 1: Introduction

**Q1** Please provide your name.

Jessica Karjala

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

I am running for a third term in the Montana Legislature because I am passionate about helping others and consider my work in the legislature as serving the voters of Montana. Advocating for people with disabilities in the Administrative Court piqued my interest in policy and inspired me to volunteer for campaigns and to start my own political group. Eventually my passion for service and policy led to my running for office in 2014. I have been proud to successfully sponsor legislation to help people with disabilities, to strengthen guardianship law and help secure \$1 million dollars for suicide prevention.

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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?

The most important issue related to growing business in Billings is establishing a sustainable economy. In order to grow business we must first stabilize the local economic base by moving away from businesses that are prone to boom and bust cycles and developing and investing in businesses that are consistent and stable. If we move away from industries that are susceptible to the volatility of greater markets and support and develop businesses and nonprofits based on constant supply and demand we can make accurate, long term tax revenue projections and develop reliable budgets for long range planning. We should also prioritize support and development of locally owned businesses so that the profits are reinvested in the community and the state instead of leaving the community and/or the state. Funding better reimbursement rates for healthcare, education, and human services, renewing Medicaid Expansion, providing more funding for the arts, and incentivizing travel and tourism and technology would create jobs, generate steady and reliable tax streams and help us move away from historical boom and bust cycles that have hindered our ability to make significant economic progress.

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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?

I support the local option authority because I believe every community should have the ability to determine whether or not to exercise a local option. As long as parameters against taxing food, household goods and medications were placed on the local option authority I would support the authority because it gives control to local voters – and that includes the ability to vote against – or for a local option.

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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?

When TIF districts have already been utilized to full capacity fear of increased property taxes is legitimate. In order to ensure TIF we need to understand that high property taxes are not solely attributable to TIF, but to many other factors including the need for local tax payers to absorb costs that are not sufficiently funded at the state level. For example, when the state fails to fully fund education the costs must be absorbed at the local level. In order to avoid continued increases in property tax to fund local needs, we need to elect people who are willing to fully fund educational needs and other needs at the state level so that property taxes don't continue to unnecessarily rise. When the legislature only funds part of a need or fails to fund a need at all the cost is shifted to the local level. Lack of funding does not mean the need goes away. In fact, the need often increases along with the cost when not fully funded up front.

**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.:

I would be glad to work with the Billings Chamber and lodging partners to help bring more of the facility use tax from Billings hoteliers back to our regional Convention & Visitors Bureau.

**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 supported the facility funding request for MSU Billings during the 65th session of the Montana Legislature because I agree MSU Billings is an essential economic driver for our community and surrounding area and assists with workforce development, but it is also the lifeblood of the community. Given the high percentage of MSU Billings graduates who gain employment in the community and remain in Billings, it is a foundation upon which our business, arts, education and healthcare industries rely because as Albert Einstein said "once you stop learning you start dying".

**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?

If a state funding source were identified and developed for the One Big Sky Center I would support it if I knew that the effort to find a developer from the state of Montana had been exhausted before contracting with a developer from out of state. I would also need to know that funding for crisis and transitional housing and affordable housing would be included as part of the plan. I would also question the viability of a convention center located in a city without a nondiscrimination ordinance. When most corporations have human resources policies against discrimination they would not risk hosting a convention in a city that would not reinforce and support their policies and put them at risk.

## 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.:

I absolutely do not believe cutting state reimbursements to hospitals, clinics and other healthcare providers is a way to address budget shortfalls. In fact, one of the most difficult parts of serving in the Montana Legislature was witnessing the extreme austerity applied to reimbursement rates. I cannot believe the majority would rather cut funding for vital services, causing a great deal of suffering and hardship, than to reinstate capital gains taxes on the passive/investment income of the most wealthy.

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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?

Because income taxes compose a high percentage of our current tax base whenever employment in a large sector is negatively impacted, so is our state budget. Instead of relying so heavily on income taxes we must diversify or continue to experience periods of boom and bust causing hardship and impairing our ability to make accurate revenue projections, develop budgets and develop long range plans. Democrats brought many good ideas to the last legislative session to diversify our tax base and make it more immune to periods of revenue volatility. We sponsored legislation to reinstate the capital gains tax, to increase the hospitality tax, taxes on tobacco, and rental cars. We also discussed ways to increase taxes on second homes and luxury homes owned by people from out of state and internet retailers like Amazon because these types of taxes would not impact most working Montanans. However, the Republican majority would not consider any new sources of revenue.

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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 have worked with Billings lawmakers from both sides of the aisle since 2015 and will be glad to work with all of them again to pass good legislation that supports Billings and the surrounding area.

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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.

**Leg Pic 3\_edited.jpg (146KB)**

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