

The Billings Montana  
Chamber of Commerce  
and  
Convention and Visitors Bureau

2008/2009





This Public Policy Manual has been compiled to communicate to our members, elected officials, and decision makers where the Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau stands on numerous issues important to the business community. Each policy area includes a short explanation of each issue along with our stated position and our recommendations to lawmakers.

The Billings Chamber/CVB represents 1100 businesses across the region that employs 40,000 people. We are the voice for business and are committed to ensuring a favorable economic, legal, and regulatory climate for the business community. Each policy position we have taken has been carefully vetted by our board. Our mission is to publicly support policies that will facilitate economic growth in our community. We hope that you will take the time to become engaged in these issues.

At all levels of government, well-intentioned initiatives often have unintended consequences. Without input from the business community, these initiatives could adversely impact the ability of businesses to generate jobs and to create higher standards of living. However, when business leaders communicate with their elected officials, better public policies result.

This manual includes contact information for elected representatives at the local, state, and federal levels as well as tips on how best to communicate with them.

We hope that you will find this public policy manual useful. To accomplish our many legislative objectives, it is essential that the local business community becomes engaged in the issues and active in communicating our positions to our elected officials.

John Brewer  
President/CEO  
Billings Chamber of Commerce  
Convention and Visitors Bureau





# Mission and Vision Statements

**Our MISSION is to develop a strong business climate and vibrant economy by serving the community in a leadership role thereby enhancing the quality of life.**

**Our VISION is to achieve excellence in community leadership and growth.**

## Preamble

As an advocate for business, the Chamber believes in free enterprise. We are pro-entrepreneurial and support the capitalist system.

Business, including agriculture, is the basis of economic growth and prosperity. We believe that government has a role in ensuring the health and welfare of us as citizens. Part of that role is to collect taxes and fees to pay for necessary services for society. Our duty as a business advocate is to ensure that the regulations on business and the taxes and fees collected for services are not excessive.

We believe in local control and authority, and citizen involvement. While we believe in individual freedom and private property rights, we also believe in personal responsibility. We recognize that there will be differences between industries in Montana.

What is good for business and agriculture is generally good for Montana. The role of government is to provide those services that business cannot. The Chamber supports using the most efficient and effective means of providing government services by streamlining governmental services, and privatizing services government units whenever effective, appropriate and economical.

The Chamber believes that government, no matter what level, should operate as efficiently and openly as possible. Any governmental entity should conduct business on a competitive basis. That entity should encourage local participation on contracts for goods and services to “client” businesses (local businesses for local government, state businesses for Montana government). We should not grant rule-making authority lightly, or completely, to governmental agencies. We have the obligation to involve ourselves in rule-making decisions. The Chamber opposes the shifting of mandated duties to lower levels of government or private entities without the funding to carry out those mandates. We will pursue coordination and consolidation of duties, regulations, and licensing whenever economically feasible. Cutting governmental bureaucracy and removing excessive regulations remain a high priority for us.

Administratively, the Chamber encourages its members, the business community, and local governing bodies to use the services and expertise of local professionals and consultants whenever possible.

The following public policy statements have been developed by the Chamber keeping in mind our vision, mission, and our pro-business philosophy.



# Taxation

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes in a comprehensive tax plan requiring statewide reform that is equitable and takes into account the need for a responsible and efficient government. The tax structure needs to provide sustainable and adequate funding for necessary services and should promote planned economic development and growth through the creation of positive economic policies. This type of mandate requires broad support throughout the state from legislators, the business community, cities and counties, and the general public. The Chamber will continue to evaluate and weigh the pros and cons of any statewide sales tax legislation proposals and will work to move acceptable legislation forward.

As an alternative to passage and implementation of a general sales and use tax, the Chamber realizes that it may be necessary to devote its resources to passage of intermediate goals if a general sales tax meets substantial resistance. The most prominent of the alternatives would be expansion of the resort tax/local option taxing authority.

A crucial element of comprehensive sales tax reform must include, but not be limited to, significant reductions in property and/or income tax while remaining revenue neutral for Montana taxpayers and must return a portion of the tax collected to local government. If the option to be pursued becomes an expansion of the resort tax expansion or a local option tax, a significant portion of the tax collected must be returned to the taxpayer as property tax relief, implementation must be approved by a majority vote of the electorate, must have a stated purpose(s) for the funds proposed to be collected, and must have a sunset provision.

This will be a multi-year priority project and require participation in interim legislative committees, discussions with our area legislative candidates, our community partners, and local government officials, as well as creating comprehensive resident awareness. Once consensus is reached, it will be imperative that the Chamber and its community partners reach out to our counterparts statewide to build a greater coalition. Since tax policy is also created through rulemaking authority, the Chamber will be vigilant in defending current positions. With anticipated current biennium and potential future budget surpluses, maintaining or reducing current levels of funding in state government will be part of the Chamber's overall taxation program of work.

Tax incentives should only be considered as an alternative option, and should be available to both new and expanding businesses. Tax policy should provide adequate funding for the public well being, without hindering the ability of business to create, compete and react in the free market. Government has an obligation to use tax revenue prudently, providing the best services at a reasonable cost.

During the 2007 session of the legislature, the Montana Department of Revenue proposed several pieces of legislation which would move authority for decision making from the local level to the state. The Chamber believes that consolidation of this authority is not in the best interests of the communities throughout Montana and will work to retain these powers at the local level.



## Specific Issues

### **Tax Increment Finance and Business Improvement Districts**

The Chamber supports the ability of Local Governments to establish tax increment finance and business districts that seek to promote economic development, infrastructure expansion and development, and taxable growth. The districts need to be established in cooperation with, and possibly benefit, other tax entities such as local school districts, cities, and counties. The Chamber continues to support The Chamber opposes any changes in the Tax increment Financing District rules and regulations as proposed by the Montana Department of Revenue and supports being a part of any coalition that may be formed to oppose these changes in the rules and regulations.

### **Expansion of the Resort Tax Authority/Local Option**

The Chamber supports the removal of resort tax limitations which would allow for all communities in Montana to determine whether or not they want to implement this tax, and for what purposes. In the event that expansion of the resort tax fails to receive legislative support, the Chamber supports local option taxing authority. Either expansion of the resort tax or local option taxing authority should have local voted authorization and purpose, a sunset provision, substantial property tax relief, and should be used primarily in the community in which it is generated. Accordingly, we need to have a draft piece of legislation that contains all of the elements listed above:

1. It will give the local government entity the power to implement a local option/resort tax it approved by a vote of the people.
2. The tax must be for a stated purpose, on specific goods and services and must contain a sunset provision.
3. There must be a portion of the tax collected that is returned to the property owners as property tax relief, probably in the 25% collected range.
4. A portion of the tax collected must be shared with rural government entities using some formula for calculation and distribution.

### **Statewide Sales Tax**

The Chamber supports a statewide sales and use tax with the current constitutional cap of 4%, primarily as a replacement tax and as part of a broader tax reform plan.

### **Estate Tax**

The Chamber supports finding an equitable compromise to the present federal estate tax legislation scheduled to sunset December 31, 2010.

### **Alternative Minimum Tax**

The Chamber supports eliminating the federal Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT).

### **Fees**

The Chamber believes fees must be tied to services rendered, not created as a replacement for lost taxing authority. Therefore, they should reflect the cost of providing that service. The Chamber also believes that powers that rest with local authorities, such as tax abatement should remain within the local jurisdiction and should not be assumed by the Montana Department of Revenue.

### **Property Taxes**

The Chamber supports basing property taxes on assessed value, not acquisition value. We support continuing reduction and elimination of the business equipment (personal property) tax as a part of a statewide tax reform package.



## **2009 Session Potential Issues**

In the 2007 Legislative session, the Department of Revenue introduced a number of proposals, most of which the Chamber opposed. It is anticipated that the Department will re-introduce these proposals in the 2009 session. While the Chamber will once again evaluate each proposal on its merits, the Chamber will continue to hold the same position in 2009 as it did in 2007 if the proposals discussed below are submitted in the same form by the Department.

### **Real Estate Investment Trusts (2007 Session)**

The Task Force felt that the anticipated legislation would be a significant disincentive to business development in Montana and opposes this measure.

### **Abusive Tax Avoidance Transactions (2007 Session)**

Everyone should pay their fair share of taxes; however anticipated legislation has potential unintended consequences and was opposed by the Task Force. The authority to determine what is “abusive” is too discretionary. Penalties ~~are~~ may also be imposed for failure to report.

### **Withholding for Non-Resident Sales of Property (2007 Session)**

In 2007, the Department of Revenue estimated that there is a 70% non-compliance reporting rate on real estate sales in Montana by non-residents. The economic impact shown in the Fiscal note assumed additional tax revenues in excess of \$10,000,000 annually. The Task Force supported this legislation under the assumption that it not be expanded to include Montana residents and is limited in scope only to non-residents.

### **Grantor Trusts (2007 Session)**

This potential legislation is searching for potentially abusive tax shelters or income and has an unknown fiscal impact. The Task Force opposed until a case can be made for needing this type of legislation and an accurate Fiscal Note can be established.

### **Trust Tax Refunds (2007 Session)**

Examples of trust taxes include withholding taxes; the retail telecommunications excise tax and the lodging facility use tax. Refunds would go to the individual or entity that paid the tax, not to the company that collected the tax. If the individual or entity that paid the tax cannot be located, the refund becomes unclaimed property or state general fund money. The Task Force opposed this anticipated legislation.

### **Follow Federal Practice of Withholding on Retirement Fund Withdrawals**

The state is concerned that without withholding, the distribution is spent and when any taxes are ultimately due, the funds to pay the taxes are not available. The fiscal impact is minimal and the Task Force opposed this type of legislation.

### **Make Corporation Tax Statute of Limitations Equal to Individual Tax Statute of Limitations (2007 Session)**

Currently the statute of limitations is three (3) years for corporations and five (5) years for individuals. The proposed 2007 legislation which did not pass would extend the statute of limitations for corporations to five (5) years. The Task Force opposed this measure and further suggests that if equality is the objective, the statute of limitations should be three (3) years for both individuals and corporations.

### **Clarify Confidentiality Laws (2007 Session)**

The Task force opposed any legislation that would allow disclosure of any corporate or individual tax returns, as well as any exchange of this information among state agencies.



### **Improve Collections Management by the Department of Revenue (2007 Session)**

This recommendation would provide the department with the ability to file wage and fund levies electronically with institutions and businesses that have the capacity to receive these documents electronically. It would also allow the additional hiring of out of state collection services to collect delinquent taxes. The Task Force opposed this proposed legislation.

### **Lodging Tax Base Definition**

On-line travel companies charge the 4% lodging tax on the room fee plus their fee. This legislation would require these companies to remit to the state the portion of the lodging tax which they collect on their fee. The Task Force opposed this legislation as the cost/benefit appears nominal.





# Energy

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber is an advocate of a nationwide free market in respect to energy. We recognize that the production, processing and distribution of energy create good-paying primary and secondary jobs and provide fiscal benefit to the State of Montana. We believe that in a free market the needs of adequate power; fair power pricing and affordable energy will be established. We believe that increasing the supply of energy sources in Montana, including oil, coal, coal bed natural gas, wind, fuel cells, gas, solar and alternative methods will be a part of the help to find a solution to the current and future power needs facing our state and country. Energy production, processing and distribution methods, traditional and alternative, may prove to be economical and efficient ways to accomplish this goal. The Chamber also encourages conservation efforts allowing our current supply of energy to be sustained.

## Specific Issues

### **Responsible Energy Exploration and Development**

Responsible energy exploration and development, based on sound science and not driven by unsubstantiated rhetoric, on public and private lands are crucial to resolving our nation's energy crisis and building Montana's economy.

### **Coal Bed Natural Gas Development**

The Chamber believes that coal bed natural gas development should be explored and may be encouraged and will we will support coal bed natural gas projects, proposed legislation, rules and regulations which are based on sound science. We will support legislative efforts that seek to encourage environmentally responsible coal bed natural gas development and deployment.

### **Publicly Owned Energy Facilities/Infrastructure**

We generally oppose any public competition in the private business arena. Any attempts by the State of Montana, or local governmental entities, to own or operate existing or new power generation facilities/power distribution infrastructure must be subject to the most stringent cost benefit analysis.

### **Other Alternative Sources**

The Chamber supports alternative power generators such as wind, solar, fuel cells and others as long as they are effective and all costs are disclosed.

### **Oil Refineries**

The Chamber supports the growth and greater production of existing area oil refineries.

### **Public Policy**

Consistent public policy and prudent tax policy needs to occur for long-term planning, production, processing and distribution.

### **Carbon Sequestration**

We support responsible Carbon Sequestration Legislation and Rule Making if technology is available and affordable, and is justified by a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis.





## **Coal Reserves**

We support the development of coal reserves in Southeastern Montana. We recognize the importance of coal production in providing economic benefits and opportunity to local communities in this region and the spillover benefits that result for the Billings area and our members. We also recognize the significance of coal production to the state economy and the financial assistance it affords local communities throughout Montana. Coal demand is rising and we believe Montana has an opportunity to participate in this market increase. The responsible and timely development of new coal mines will provide a much needed economic boost to Montana. We therefore support efforts that will enable new coal production to occur, including the development of railroad infrastructure and securing access to federal and state-owned coal reserves.

## **Coal Bed Natural Gas Water Discharge**

Recognizing that water is the lifeblood of Montana and recognizing that coal bed natural gas production brings up volumes of this precious resource in the daily operation of energy production, we support water management practices based on sound science that is based on DEQ and EPA standards. Further, we support practices that provide for beneficial use of this water resource whenever feasible. Because of the complexities of individual land use, landowner preferences, and water quality and quantity, we also support the implementation of a toolbox approach to water management. The toolbox approach allows the operator and landowner to use sound science and knowledge of the land to develop site specific management plans that will maximize beneficial uses, protect the environment and allow the economic benefit of energy production.



# Healthcare

## Basic Philosophy

The healthcare industry in Billings – providing a wide variety of high quality physical, mental, and preventative health services – is a major force in our local and state economy and in economic development. The health care industry is facing serious workforce shortage issues and through educational partnerships we can enhance our recruitment and retention efforts, as well as educate, train, and provide degree advancement opportunities. The health care industry in Billings can benefit people in rural areas by assisting with the unique challenges of access for consumers and recruitment and retention of health care professionals.

Government regulations significantly drive up costs causing great harm to efforts focused on making health care services and coverage more affordable. The increasing number of uninsured and underinsured Montanans is a major concern to the business community, especially regarding coverage for employees and their children, and we support cooperative efforts involving the healthcare industry and all other employers to seek workable and affordable solutions.

### **We encourage and support:**

- Collaboration among health and human service providers with compatible philosophic and business principles, while encouraging competition that results in cost containment, improved quality, and improved access to care.
- Self-responsibility and appropriate access to health care services.
- Education of consumers about healthy lifestyle choices, insurance coverage options, and appropriate access of health care services.
- The care, safety, and treatment of our most vulnerable citizens: children, the elderly, and disabled.
- A viable private and public health care system that seeks to empower individuals in health promotion and disease prevention activities while recognizing the need for a strong health safety net for those members of our community in need.
- Legislative interim studies contemplated in SJ 15 and HJ 48 addressing health care delivery systems, hospital/physician relations, and health insurance reform – including a regular review of coverage mandates.
- Tax exempt status of not-for-profit health care/human service providers.
- Ongoing scrutiny and consideration of medical liability reform measures.
- Holding down soaring healthcare costs due to explosive growth in medical liability awards and insurance costs by limiting awards for non-economic damages (all medical costs and lost earnings could still be recovered).
- Availability of options such as health savings accounts, association health plans, and provider price transparency – all in support of consumer choice and education.
- Medicare payment reforms that reward quality performance with appropriate levels of reimbursement for hospitals and doctors, as well as modernizing Medicare services through reforms such as a prescription drug benefit and preserving the overall solvency of the program.
- Strengthening and continuation of the employer based healthcare system.
- Incentives for more Americans to purchase health insurance by enacting refundable tax credits.
- Allowing for greater consumer choice by regularly examining additional state mandates on healthcare plans and closely scrutinizing any proposed additional mandates.
- Increased dental access for low-income individuals and families, especially children.



## Specific Issues

### **Reimbursements:**

We believe in fair government reimbursements to health care and human service providers that at least cover the cost of providing services. Covering costs of providing service will protect against cost shifting to private sector payers, thereby reducing the cost of employee coverage for the business community. We support the healthcare industry's position on issues such as:

1. Hospital Provider Fee, Nursing Home Bed Tax, Medicaid Direct Care Wage Increases, and Inter-Governmental Transfers for both hospitals and nursing homes
2. Air ambulance payments for hospitals, and
3. Physician payments.

### **Increased Health Insurance Coverage:**

We support allowing companies to band together and form Small Business Health Plans, which can negotiate lower prices and better choices than small businesses can find on their own. We also support legislation that encourages more Americans to save for medical expenses tax-free by expanding Health Saving Accounts and allowing those with Flexible Spending Accounts to roll over unused balances to pay for future medical expenses. We support enacting refundable tax credits to increase health insurance coverage for employees and support programs such as CHIP for children through private sector and government efforts. To cover more employees, we support exploration of options such as tax credits/incentives, HSA's, and AHP's.

### **Affordable and Accessible Healthcare:**

The Chamber encourages the healthcare industry to work closely with the education and business communities to explore ways to reduce the costs of healthcare services while maintaining and improving the quality of care and the level of access for consumers. The United States has the world's best health care system, but it is being priced out of reach for more and more American citizens. Five straight years of double-digit health insurance premium increases have pushed the number of Americans who lack coverage to over 45 million. Companies struggle to find healthcare plans that provide adequate coverage and are still affordable.

The Chamber recognizes that most healthcare coverage is provided by employers, although statistics indicate that rising costs are making it increasingly difficult for employers to afford to maintain that coverage. Because of the dire societal effects caused by lack of health care coverage, it is essential to make it easier for employers and their employees to afford the health care coverage they need and the quality they deserve.

### **Consumer Education:**

The consuming public will benefit from education efforts to inform people about health care options, healthy lifestyle choices, various insurance plans, and appropriate ways to initially access health care services. Our goal is for consumers to be able to make informed decisions before making such choices.

### **Regulations:**

Governmental regulations of the health care industry, though well-intended, significantly drive up the costs of providing health care services and coverage while also complicating the delivery and processing of services and products. The public is best served by balancing the goals of regulation with the associated costs of compliance. For instance, HIPAA benefits consumers by protecting personal information, but compliance is costly and time-consuming.



### **Technology:**

We support the funding and implementation necessary to bring about an Information Technology (IT) revolution to the entire health care industry. Increased use of IT and Tele-Medicine will lower costs while increasing efficiency and access, especially in rural areas. Also, in rural areas there should be examination of potentially using alternate types of providers offering health care services, such as nurse practitioners. In particular, the Chamber supports the ongoing efforts of the statewide HIT Task Force, initiated by Sen. Max Baucus, that is developing a pilot project of interconnectivity among Montana's health care providers.

### **Administration:**

A major source of cost savings would be streamlining the delivery of health care services and the processing of insurance applications and claims, including a reduction in the number of privacy notices and standardization and uniformity of insurance applications, forms, and claims processing.

### **Higher Education:**

We need to strengthen the stature of higher education in Billings through collaboration with our local healthcare industry and business community. Collaboration involving Montana's higher education institutions will benefit consumers of health care services, our local economy, and employees. Strengthening the stature of higher education in Billings will assist the healthcare industry in recruiting and retaining physicians and other healthcare professionals.

An important aspect of the strategy should be strengthened linkage between health care and the MSU-B College of Allied Health to explore proposals such as a medical school in Billings. Increased partnering with the WWAMI program should be promoted to offer incentives to attract physicians and other health care professionals to the Billings area.

### **Bioscience Research and Development:**

We recognize great potential in local economic development focused on the highly technical field of bioscience research and development. Collaboration involving the health care industry and RMC and MSU-B are particularly essential to success in this area.

Progress in encouraging technology transfer for the bioscience fields will be possible if consultation services and educational programs are developed to promote access to the federal grants and contracts programs of the Small Business Innovation Research initiatives. These are grant programs that many small businesses are not trained to compete for through the peer review process. Success in bringing in grants through these programs will stimulate the needed start-up for small businesses.

### **Workforce Needs and Shortages:**

The current focus of workforce needs and shortages is in the field of nursing, and much teamwork lies ahead in tackling this important issue. Many other types of ancillary professionals in health care require attention as well. Higher education is critical in providing education, training, and opportunities for degree advancement. The Chamber supports development of a mechanism to access federal dollars for workforce training and equipment, including one-time needs and new programs. Training for incumbent and entry-level health care workers should be considered.

### **Affordable Housing:**

An important aspect of overall community health and well-being is affordable housing for low-income individuals and families, some of whom may be members of the local health care workforce. The Chamber supports state and federal subsidization to realize affordable housing.



### **Limited Service Hospitals:**

We support the current statutory moratorium on limited service hospitals to allow issues of conflict of interest through self-referral and the potential loss of a healthcare safety net to be fully addressed. By carving off services that are typically net revenue producers for full-service hospitals such as SVH and BC, limited service hospitals have caused tremendous financial harm to full-service hospitals in several states. The moratorium will allow the Montana legislature to examine this issue via the interim study anticipated in SJ 15 in preparation for the 2009 session. Meanwhile, Congress continues to debate the matter. Limited-service hospitals argue that the free market should prevail and that patients benefit by having choice with quality outcomes.

Hospitals argue that self-referral is a conflict of interest resulting in unfair competition and point to studies showing limited service hospitals cherry-pick healthier patients and patients with better paying insurance coverage, leaving severely ill, uninsured, and underinsured to full-service hospitals.

### **HIFA Waiver (Health Insurance Flexibility and Accountability):**

We support federal approval of the State's submitted HIFA waiver. If approved by the federal agency Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, the HIFA Waiver will result in federal matching dollars helping to pay for children and adult Medicaid medical and mental health services. Approval of this waiver will serve to free up state general fund dollars that will be used to address other health care funding needs, such as the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

### **Mental Health:**

During the interim, the legislature will study various aspects of Montana's mental health delivery system and various related issues. The Chamber supports Improved government payment for mental health services, which would be beneficial both providers and patients.

### **Community Crisis Center:**

We support strengthening the local health care safety net through initiatives such as the Community Crisis Center. The Community Crisis Center is a newly developed facility in Billings aimed at evaluating people who currently land in the Emergency Department in both hospitals, typically for a combination of mental health and substance abuse problems. People who come to the CCC are evaluated and then directed to the appropriate treatment, if necessary. The CCC is a partnership of SVH, BC, YCCHD, and the Mental Health Center who all believe that the CCC will save money and provide better, more focused treatment for the patients. This facility also has great potential for rural outreach. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services have reacted very positively to the CCC and is considering it as a model for other Montana communities.

### **Public Health and Safety:**

During the 2007 legislative session, the legislature addressed public health planning and safety issues. In particular, the Chamber supports the concept of coordinated community actions in emergency situations, as was proposed in SB 142. Responding to public health emergencies requires a coordinated approach between traditional emergency responders and public health system professionals in order to protect health and safety of all Montanans. Disease does not limit itself to one location or jurisdiction and controlling disease may take federal, state and local level coordination. We need a framework to address Montana's vulnerabilities in a public health emergency. Such a framework should include:

- ✍ Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of responders in a public health emergency,
- ✍ Provisions to quickly license/credential out-of-state volunteer health care workers responding to a public health emergency,
- ✍ Limited liability protections for in-state and out-of-state volunteer healthcare workers responding to a public health emergency,
- ✍ Development of a state public health emergency response plan with involvement from the appropriate state, local and tribal public health, emergency response and other agencies, which would work within the existing Montana Disaster and Emergency Services System.

**Medical Liability and Tort Reform:**

The Chamber supports medical liability and related tort reform. Medical malpractice lawsuits have pushed medical liability insurance premiums so high that doctors and clinics are limiting or even closing their practices, leaving patients without care. During the 2005 legislative session, nine reform bills were passed into law, and indications are that premium rates for health care providers have somewhat stabilized, although the number of liability insurance carriers has not increased. The Chamber will continue to monitor this important aspect of public policy and support reform legislation as needed.



# Transportation/Managed Growth

## Basic Philosophy

A fully integrated transportation network is essential to our economy. In addition to traveling to and from work, we count on transportation every time we make an on-line purchase on the Internet, every time we expect an urgent overnight delivery, and every time we shop for fresh foods and produce at the local market. Without extensive, well-maintained roads and highways, a well-managed public transit and rail system, and modern airports, our quality of life suffers.

The Chamber believes that a strong economy and quality of life are fostered through well-planned economic development. Managed growth encourages infill development and re-development and stresses the efficient use of open space. We believe that a quality transportation system, both surface and air, that connects Billings locally and regionally is essential for a strong local economy and for the success of Billings' area businesses in the regional and national markets.

Knowing that goods and services can be provided only as fast and effectively as our transportation system allows, the Billings Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Legislation that protects the integrity of both the Federal and State Highway Trust and Road Funds, ensures all current funds are utilized, and seizes the opportunity to rectify the impact of alternative fuels on these funds.
- Development and expansion of air transport infrastructure, including runways and terminals, to facilitate the ongoing increase in passenger miles and the expected tripling of air cargo by 2015.
- Public transportation systems that ease traffic congestion, conserve energy, increase mobility, create jobs, and generally stimulate the economy.

## Specific Issues

### Transportation Corridors

The Chamber supports improvements to transportation corridors locally and regionally that will enhance economic development and quality of life. Corridors should include non-motorized components as well as aesthetic enhancements whenever possible. Corridors presently identified are:

- a. Shiloh Road
- b. Heights-Bench Connector
- c. Inner Belt Loop/Zimmerman Trail
- d. North Bypass
- e. Airport Road/Montana Highway 3 (Great Falls to Billings)
- f. Interstate 90

### Downtown Railroad Crossings

The Chamber supports the creation of a quiet zone and associated safety enhancements (including coordinated signal systems) that will allow for the improved flow of commerce across the City, and an improved (quieter) environment better suited to residential and business activities located in close proximity to the tracks.





## **City-County Planning**

The Chamber supports a combined City-County planning department to best plan for the future growth of the greater Billings community. A cohesive City-County growth strategy is critical to provide for an efficient development process. The Chamber supports appropriate County zoning, subdivision and development standards for areas close to the City limits that are compatible with City standards and reflect the likelihood that these areas will eventually be annexed into the City. Proactive community planning, which articulates a community's vision for future development, requires the inclusion of private property. The Chamber supports the rights of private property owners and encourages substantial public notice to encourage the participation of property owners in community planning efforts. The Chamber does not believe that it is necessary or practical to require explicit permission from property owners when planning on a regional level.

## **City Annexation Policy**

1. Pursue a long term policy that would include an annual tracking of growth within the city as well as in the 5 year limit area. The Task Force supports actively pursuing alternative sources of revenue for cities and towns through the legislative process.
2. The Chamber supports City annexation of new development as a means to manage growth. The City provides infrastructure that supports economic development and City zoning and development regulations provide the guidelines for orderly, efficient growth.
3. Encourage the City and County to support additional funding for the City-County Planning Department.

## **Subdivision and Zoning Regulations**

The Chamber supports subdivision and zoning regulations that encourage efficient, orderly development, while allowing flexible and innovative development strategies. The Chamber supports the use of carefully considered incentives to encourage developers to invest in amenities such as parks, trails and open space.

## **Public Utilities**

The Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in public utilities as a way to manage the pattern of City growth and to discourage sprawl and encourage compact, space-efficient growth.

## **School District 2 Facilities**

To support a growing 21st Century economy, it is crucial that Billings have a first-rate public school system. Therefore, the Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in the infrastructure that supports public education, including maintenance and revitalization of existing facilities and continuous long-range planning.

## **Quality of Life Amenities**

The Chamber believes that proactive planning and investment in quality of life amenities, such as parks, trails, preserved open space, and recreational and cultural facilities is crucial to attracting economic investment and maintaining a vibrant work force.

## **Public and Alternative Forms of Transportation**

In this era of traffic congestion, high gas prices, climate change, health concerns, and fiscal constraints, federal, state and local transportation funding has reached a crossroads. The Chamber supports investment in a more diverse transportation system that provides viable choices to walk and bike, use public transportation in addition to driving, and will lead to a far more efficient use of our transportation resources.

**Air Service**

Air Service must be maintained and in Billings even with challenging marketplace conditions and stresses on the airline. We will work to increase needed direct flights.

The Chamber supports the continuation of EAS subsidies. The 1978 Airline Deregulation Act promoted the continuation of the EAS, stating, “The maintenance of a comprehensive and convenient system of continuous airline service for small communities and for isolated areas, with direct federal assistance, where appropriate, is necessary.”

**Eminent Domain**

Condemnation is a tool that government can use to acquire private property when a parcel is necessary to complete a project that is deemed to be for the public good. The Chamber recognizes the inherent conflict between private property rights and government’s power of eminent domain. While the Chamber staunchly supports the rights of private property owners, we support the use of condemnation when the following criteria have been met:

1. The condemned property is needed to complete a public infrastructure project that was identified through an open public process.
2. The proposed project is necessary to facilitate the orderly growth, safety, and economic development of Billings.
3. Other means of negotiating a just compensation have been exhausted.



# Workforce/Business Development

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that a successful business is a joint effort among ownership, management, and labor, without prejudice. To be successful, a working relationship must be developed and encouraged. Free market forces should play a strong role in establishing and maintaining a positive employer/employee relationship.

Small businesses make a distinct and creative contribution to the Billings economy. For many seeking economic independence, small business ownership offers the greatest opportunity. Small businesses produce a major share of business innovation. Their numbers make them the largest source of private employment and the most tangible local representation of the private enterprise system in America today.

## Specific Issues

### Workforce Training

Publicly funded worker training is essential in order for Montana to be competitive when it comes to industry retention/expansion and new industry recruitment. We support continued funding to help offset the cost of training individuals for newly created “base industry sector” jobs as enacted by the 2003 and 2005 legislatures. Furthermore, we support the initiative to develop training funds and programs for incumbent worker training to assist existing businesses to expand and to utilize the talents of their incumbent workers to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace. Advancing incumbent workers to more technical and skilled positions within their companies will provide positive results for the worker, the business and Montana’s economy. We support the reduction of bureaucratic costs and improved efficiencies in the workforce system resulting in maximizing funding to train workers and assist businesses.

### Wrongful Discharge

Montana’s Wrongful Discharge Act, being the only statute of its kind in the nation, has had an adverse impact on recruiting new businesses to Montana. The Chamber vigorously opposes any action or legislation it deems will have an effect of eroding employer’s rights under the current statutes. We will support any improvements or modifications to this statute which would enhance Montana’s ability to attract and retain new or existing businesses.

### Drug and Alcohol Free Workplace

We support clarification and expansion of the 1999 legislation to allow universal drug and alcohol testing of employees with proper procedures established to safeguard the innocent.

### Wages

The Chamber believes in the ability of market forces to set wages and benefit levels. We oppose the creation of livable wage legislation.

### Workers Compensation

Workplace safety is the shared responsibility of employers and employees. We support the pursuit and prosecution of worker’s compensation fraud whether perpetuated by an employee or an employer. We support a competitive insurance market for workers’ compensation, not dominated by a single insurance carrier or the State Fund. We support the exclusive remedy doctrine for workplace injuries with the inherent trade off of legislated benefits for the injured worker without having to prove negligence. We support prompt delivery of reasonable and appropriate benefits to a worker who, in the scope and course of employment, has suffered an injury or illness as a result of a workplace environment.



## **Business**

The Chamber opposes any legislation that would mandate financial and other requirements on businesses that close down their operations or lay off many employees. One barrier to business ownership is access to capital, especially long-term debt financing. The Billings Chamber of Commerce recognizes that ensuring the availability of financing to foster the growth and expansion of businesses is in the best interest of the economy.

The Chamber supports passage of legislation that would eliminate the hurdle of “substantial justification” and allow businesses to be reimbursed for attorneys’ fees when successful in challenging government’s regulatory actions in court.

Additionally, the Chamber supports the following:

- Provide businesses with additional time to respond to an OSHA citation, increase the number of OSHA commissioners, allow small businesses the right to appeal an OSHA citation, and force OSHA to pay the legal fees of a business when a citation is overturned.
- Resolve administrative and compliance problems suffered by employers who are making a good faith effort to comply with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and prohibit FMLA expansion to business.
- Encourage passage of business tax provisions that would provide for the permanency of business expensing allowances (Section 179), the permanent elimination of the death tax, and the permanent reduction in the marginal income tax rates.
- Work for passage of the Small Business Liability Reform Act, which provides caps on punitive damage awards and proportional liability for small businesses.

## **Immigration**

There are an estimated 10.2 million undocumented migrants in the United States, and deporting them would be the equivalent of removing the population of the state of Ohio—not a very viable option. As a country, we are facing an aging population and a severe shortage of essential workers to fill jobs that Americans are unwilling or unable to take.

The Billings Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the U.S. immigration system is broken. To fix the system, a comprehensive approach is needed because it is easier to enforce laws that make sense. Enforcement alone is not the solution. The Chamber supports legislative action that:

- Is comprehensive: addressing both future economic needs for future workers and undocumented workers already in the United States.
- Strengthens national security by providing for the screening of foreign workers and creating a disincentive for illegal immigration.
- Strengthens the rule of law by establishing clear, sensible immigration laws that are effectively and vigorously enforced.
- Creates an immigration system that functions efficiently for employers, workers, and government agencies, which is based on a reliable employment eligibility confirmation system that is easy to use will, and aid businesses with deciphering federal immigration laws so that they can avoid having to hire expensive lawyers.
- Ensures that U.S. workers are not displaced by foreign workers.
- Ensures that all workers enjoy the same labor law protections.



Taken together, these proposals can help fix our broken immigration system and return business owners to doing what they do best: creating jobs. The Chamber is mindful of our nation's history and the important role immigrants have always played. In fact, our economy has always relied on waves on immigrants and in the near future, immigrants will play an even larger role in alleviating inevitable worker shortages that will be created as aging baby boomers start retiring. It is important that all Americans have access to job opportunities before they are open to foreign workers. However, we need a fast and dependable way to match willing employers with willing employees. We also need visa limitations that fluctuate according to market needs.

## **Trade**

The United States has the most open markets in the world and we as consumers benefit from being able to purchase so many goods and services from across the world. We as a nation are economically better off and more secure because of open markets. Unfortunately, too often foreign markets aren't as easily accessible. U.S. companies that manufacture goods and produce value added services as well as America's farmers find themselves facing prohibitive tariffs, quotas, and other trade related barriers keeping them from achieving their full export potential.

With 96% of the world's consumers living outside the United States, it is important that the U.S. enter into trade agreements that begin to open these markets to U.S. companies. Today, globalization means that U.S. small business comprises nearly 97% of all exporters, no longer casting trade as a big business issue. The Billings Chamber of Commerce supports the opening of foreign markets to benefit increased U.S. exports of goods, services, and agricultural products.



# Travel and Tourism

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes tourism is a vital part of the Billings economy that directly generates \$600 million each year in non-resident expenditures, and is a major employer. To create a vibrant tourism destination, the community must support its demand generators: those activities and facilities that bring guests to Billings. As a destination, there must also be adequate funding to recruit groups and individual leisure visitors through marketing and sales.

## Specific Issues

### Funding

The Chamber realizes that state tourism promotion level is inadequate. The Chamber supports the state lodging tax and the positive impacts that are made in statewide, regional and local tourism marketing. To be most effective on a local and regional level, the Chamber supports substantial reform to the rules and regulations administered through the state Tourism Advisory Council. The Chamber opposes additional use of the funds for infrastructure, or any reductions to local marketing agencies such as the Chamber. The 3% general fund lodging tax should be allocated specifically to state tourism with a portion granted to regions and CVBs.

### MetraPark

: MetraPark is a vital part of the tourism infrastructure and the Chamber believes that it is a critical time for master planning of this facility. We support a complete assessment of facility and grounds' future use that will drive the most business to the community and the facility. We support the facility's operation as a subsidized attraction in driving business to Billings and Yellowstone County and we support public investment to improve and maintain the facility and grounds. The Chamber encourages the County to maintain adequate reserves to pay for such capital repairs and replacements in the future.

### Incentives

The Chamber supports carefully considered incentives to lure conventions, groups and the film industry to the state.

### Brand Builders

The Chamber supports demand generating infrastructure and programs to bring visitors, athletes, companies and conventions to Billings while increasing our quality of life as residents. These infrastructure amenities include natural, historic and cultural amenities.

### National Park Centennial Initiative

Eighty percent of our non-resident summer travelers to Montana visit Glacier and/or Yellowstone National Park on their trip to Montana. However, chronic underfunding of our national parks has led to deterioration of critical park services and infrastructure. The President, Congress and all Americans must engage in a sustained effort to fully fund and revitalize the park system by the Park Service Centennial in 2016.



## **Travel Promotion Act**

The national travel community's highest legislative priority is passage of the Travel Promotion Act of 2007. This act would create a non-profit Corporation for Travel Promotion as part of public-private partnership to better communicate U.S. travel policies to prospective international travelers, and also promote the U.S. as the world's premier destination. International and specifically Canadians are an important and growing market for Montana, having a program that among other things more clearly explains new U.S. travel rules and procedures will encourage further travel to our state.

## **H-2B VISA (Workforce)**

Business may need to rely more heavily on international workers to fill temporary positions during peak periods. The H-2B program was created to allow short-term international workers to fill these temporary jobs capping participation at 66,000. There was a temporary exemption for workers that participated in the program in the past three years but this exemption expired on September 30, 2007. The caps are being reached way in advance which underscores the need to reform the H-2B process. Employing temporary international workers is crucial in order to provide necessary services to operate numerous businesses across Montana. Without these workers, services, length of seasons and ultimately tourism revenue to the state would suffer greatly. We would like to extend the Visa's for a greater period than 6 months and would like to see the 66,000 person cap not apply to return workers.





# Education

## Basic Philosophy

The business community is the primary consumer and beneficiary of public and private education, K-20. The Chamber supports continued funding for innovation and improvement efforts. We encourage business involvement in all aspects of public education, including business partnering with public education. We fully expect that area graduates be prepared to think critically, read, write, perform functional math, reason, communicate, and work in teams. We expect these graduates will be prepared to continue their education or enter the workforce at a proficient level. We support a safe classroom/campus environment that actively encourages the learning process. We expect public education to provide a well-educated workforce to attract new industries, train the existing work force, and solve specific business needs. We encourage and support economic development efforts of the University system, private or public, in coordination with private industry and other government entities. We need to maintain a well-qualified pool of labor for continued operations.

## Specific Issues

### **School District 2 Facilities**

In order to support a growing 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy, it is crucial that Billings have a first-rate public school system. Therefore, the Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in the infrastructure that supports public education, including proactive maintenance and revitalization of existing facilities and continuous long-range planning. We encourage this to be a key part of the schools and cities planning and zoning process for synergistic community growth.

### **Education Primary/Secondary Funding**

The Chamber supports quality primary and secondary education delivered efficiently and adequately funded, with provisions for local control. Improvements in the budgeting process, fiscal accountability, and the quality and presentation of discretionary bond issues and mill levies will be welcome improvements. The Chamber encourages public-private partnership with the School District.

### **Consolidation of Districts/Superintendent of Schools Role**

The Chamber supports investigating the consolidation of school districts on a statewide level, and re-examining the role of the County Superintendent of Schools.

### **School Attendance Areas**

Boundaries for individual schools have not been addressed for a number of years. The Chamber feels that, because of the fluidity of the student population specifically and neighborhoods in general, boundaries should be reviewed frequently and readjusted as needed to alleviate overcrowding and bussing and balance class sizes among individual schools. Emphasis should be placed on neighborhood schools rather than bussing, assuming cost factors are relative equal over the long term.

### **Magnet Schools**

The Chamber supports the concept of magnet schools which are specific in scope and do not require all of the extra-curricular activities.



## **Dual Credits**

The Chamber feels that the dual credit program where students can attend college at MSU-B and get both high school and college credit has the potential to alleviate some overcrowding in the high schools and increase attendance at MSU-B.

## **Business to School Ambassadors/Partners in Education**

The Chamber supports business to education ambassadors/partners in education program. Business ambassadors/partners would be assigned to each school principal and to all administration personnel, and help the individual school staffs understand the support the business community has for the education community, and how the education community can interact with business.

## **Financial Advice**

While the Chamber supports the goals of all levels of education for a myriad of reasons, as taxpayers we also ask these services be delivered in a financially efficient manner. The Chamber will help evaluate the financial information and value judgments that become a part of the budget.

## **Post Secondary Education Faculty/Funding**

The Chamber supports a quality system of higher education delivered efficiently. To ensure academic excellence, the Chamber supports development of a funding formula on a level that will enable the University system to attract and retain outstanding faculty. In addition, we must expand incentive programs allowing units to retain monies generated from research efforts and administrative savings. Units that develop cost-effective delivery systems and promote research efforts must benefit directly from these endeavors. The University system should be encouraged to seek additional ways to deliver cost-effective educational programming. They should explore increased cooperative degree programs, shared use of technology, consolidation of duplicate programs (where justified), and alternate uses of under utilized campuses. The Chamber supports economic development efforts of the Board of Regents and the University system as part of shared leadership projects.

## **Post Secondary Education Interface with Healthcare**

The Chamber feels that we need to strengthen the stature of higher education in Billings through collaboration with our local healthcare industry and business community.

- 1). Bioscience Research and Development  
We recognize great potential in local economic development focused on the highly technical field of bioscience research and development. Collaboration involving the healthcare industry and RMC and MSUB is particularly essential to success in this area.
- 2) Workforce Needs and Shortages  
The current focus of workforce needs and shortages is in the field of nursing, and much teamwork lies ahead in tackling this important issue. Many other types of ancillary professionals in healthcare require attention as well. Higher education is critical in providing education, training, and opportunities for degree advancement.
- 3) Higher-ed collaboration  
Collaboration involving Montana's higher education institutions will benefit consumers of healthcare services, our local economy, and employees. Strengthening the stature of higher education in Billings will assist the healthcare industry in recruiting and retaining physicians and other healthcare professionals.

## **Post Secondary Education Interface with Business**

The Chamber encourages the continuation and expansion of dialogue and cooperative ventures between higher education and private businesses that address workforce training needs and shortages and promote partnerships to pursue business opportunities.



### **Post Secondary Education Transfer Credit Applicability**

The Chamber recommends that the Board of Regents adopt a policy by which all the Montana public post-secondary institutions adopt a curriculum that allows ready transfer of basic core course credits among any of the state units.

### **Facilities**

The Chamber supports continuation of a formal long-range capital building plan for the University system. Montana State University-Billings is an integral part of our community and investment in its infrastructure is critical to its continuation. We support the acquisition of additional land where needed to insure orderly long term growth.

### **Six-mill Post Secondary Education Statewide Funding**

Until a better alternative is found, the Chamber supports funding of the six-mill levy for higher education.



# Justice and Corrections

## Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes in a justice system that is open and accessible to any citizen and provides full compensation for genuine injury, while limiting frivolous litigation and inappropriate awards.

The Chamber also believes in an orderly society governed by laws. Those who violate those laws by infringing upon the rights of people or property should be subjected to correction or rehabilitation. Those who cannot be corrected or rehabilitated should be incarcerated in the most cost-effective way; emphasis should be on prevention, not detention. Chamber members already support corrections expenses through high taxes and fees and need to ensure that those expenses are being used in effective and cost-effective treatment of offenders.

## Specific Issues

### Sentencing

We support differing levels of correction, including alternate sentencing and work-release for young or first-time offenders and detention for hard-core criminals. We ask the judicial system to follow guidelines for sentencing. We believe in fair, fast, and just sentencing.

### Funding

We support funding and evaluating private prisons and pre-release centers, in appropriate locations, as alternatives. We believe in rehabilitation, and the offenders should play a part in paying their own way. Restitution, including the cost of incarceration, garnishment, and seizure of assets should all be options for funding.



# Telecommunications Reform

## Basic Philosophy

For the first time since 1996, the U.S. Congress is undertaking a thorough review of the nation's telecommunications laws. Maintaining America's position as a global leader in telecommunications is key to sustaining real economic growth and improving our standard of living.

Unfortunately, the nation's telecommunications laws have failed to keep pace with advances in technology, have stifled new investments by the private sector, and have denied consumers and our economy the full benefits of a wide variety of new telecommunications services and choices.

## Specific Issues

Recognizing that an economic climate that fosters innovation and investment in its telecommunications industry is vital to a healthy and vibrant business community, the Billings Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Updating telecommunications laws to foster innovation, expand consumer choice, spur investment, create jobs, enhance efficiency, and increase productivity.
- A statutory and regulatory structure that allows telecommunications markets to be driven by consumer demand advances in technology, and competition between telecommunication companies, while encouraging public safety, consumer protection, access for people with disabilities, and other public interest goals.
- Universal service that ensures affordable basic telephone service for all Americans and Internet access in the nation's schools and libraries. Increased use of Information Technology (IT) and Tele-health will lower costs while increasing efficiency and access, especially in the rural areas.
- Repealing discriminatory or excessive telecommunications taxes and obsolete regulations that limit Americans' access to innovative services and choices.
- Encouraging consumer choice and private-sector investment to drive the deployment of high-speed Internet access into our communities.
- Increasing the spectrum for innovative wireless services. The Billings Chamber also supports tax credits to establish federal and state subsidies for infrastructure for the benefit of rural areas.



# Grassroots Guide

The input of members and constituents to legislative members is critical to the legislative process. It is important that you communicate on issues that concern your business interests throughout the legislative session. The following are sites you may wish to use to communicate to your elected officials in Helena.

Legislative website: [www.leg.state.mt.us/session.htm](http://www.leg.state.mt.us/session.htm)

For Legislative Information or to call a legislator: **1-406-444-4800**

To track specific bills log on to [http:// laws.leg.state.mt](http://laws.leg.state.mt)

The Billings Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to keep you informed about federal issues important to your business. In addition to the positions that the Chamber has taken, the VoteForBusiness grassroots network allows you to track other issues important to you and your business. Follow the four steps outlined below to get involved and become active:

## 1. Sign up and create a profile.

Go to [www.VoteForBusiness.com](http://www.VoteForBusiness.com) and sign up for the VoteForBusiness Grassroots Team. We will send you e-mails on the issues that you specify. If you are receiving too much or too little information, you can modify your profile at any time by logging on to [www.VoteForBusiness.com](http://www.VoteForBusiness.com). The VoteForBusiness E-Advocates Action Center gives you access to these targeted messages as well as the opportunity to take action on other current issues.

## 2. Learn about the legislators who represent you.

Through VoteForBusiness you can obtain information on who your legislators are, what congressional committees they serve on, their voting records on business issues, their contact information, and their political backgrounds. This information, coupled with the issue analyses that we provide, will give your communications with your elected officials added impact.

## 3. Track the legislative and regulatory issues you care about most.

Congress deals with hundreds of issues every year, and VoteForBusiness keeps you up to date on the issues you care about. You may also want to request that your legislators put your name on their mailing lists. That way, they will be able to inform you when they are working on issues that could directly affect your business.

## 4. TAKE ACTION!

We understand that your time is valuable and that taking action on a legislative or regulatory issue is often not your top priority. However, in politics the adage that “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” is true, and too often the special interests seeking more regulations and higher taxes on businesses take the time to communicate their opinions. That is why VoteForBusiness is so important, and your active participation is needed. [www.VoteForBusiness.com](http://www.VoteForBusiness.com) allows you to send a message to your legislator quickly and easily. Simply visit the site, select the issue that interest you and click. Take action to edit or send our sample letter directly to your lawmaker.



# Grassroots Tips

## Writing Effective Letters to Elected Officials

Writing a personalized letter to your legislators is still the most effective way to express your opinions. It is impossible for elected officials to know how every bill they vote on will affect your business. A well-written letter will often help lawmakers understand the critical elements of pending legislation before they take a position for or against a particular bill.

Address for U.S. Representative Is:

The Honorable Dennis Rehberg  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Address for U.S. Senators is:

The Honorable Max Baucus/Jon Tester  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

1. Include your complete return address to prove that you are a constituent. Write on one issue per letter and identify the bill number (e.g., H.R. 215) in the first paragraph.
2. Keep your message local, personal, and concise. Provide specific examples of how the legislation will impact your business, industry, and employees. Try to write no more than one page.
3. Above all, maintain a professional tone in your letter. We know that you feel strongly about your views, but showing anger toward your legislators will only cause them to discount your opinion. You need to foster a positive, and ideally long-term, relationship with your legislators if you want them to be receptive.
4. Provide background on your industry and the issue. Don't assume that your legislators are familiar with the impact any bill will have on your business or that they have already taken a position on it.
5. Clearly state the action you would like your lawmaker to take, e.g., "please vote against H.R. 215."
6. Ask for a reply that outlines your lawmaker's position.
7. Choose your battles. While you should try to build a relationship with your elected officials, you should not write so often that you become known for a single issue or as constant letter writer.





## Sample Letter to Members of Congress

January 9, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

I am writing to urge you to vote against H.R. 215, a bill that would increase the minimum wage to \$8.00 an hour. Any increase in the minimum wage would mean significant job loss, higher labor costs for my small business, and higher costs for consumers.

A wage hike will also undermine efforts to move people from welfare to work, as employers, forced to pay more, will hire better skilled workers. A government-mandated wage increase is simply government-mandated inflation. Mandated wages are bad for small businesses, the economy, and for my business in particular.

As a member of the Billings Chamber of Commerce, I am kept up to date on all business issues and will be watching this vote closely. Again, I urge you to vote against H.R. 215. Please contact me with your position on this critical business issue.

Sincerely,

Jerry Wild  
President  
ABC Computer Company  
1212 Franklin Street  
Billings, Montana 59100



## Phoning Your Legislators

When you call your elected officials, a staff member will answer the phone. You should request, but do not expect, to be connected to your legislator. Usually you will be asked to leave a detailed message with that staff member. You may also ask to be transferred to the chief of staff or the legislative assistant who handles that particular issue.

- Emphasize that you are a constituent. Be sure to leave your full name and address so that the legislator can mail you a response.
- Explain your standpoint on the legislation in as much detail as you are comfortable with. You should always be prepared to explain why you do or do not support a specific bill, so keep our communications nearby to use as a reference.
- If you are speaking to a staff member, ask for his or her insight and the member's position.

## Sending E-mails to Your Legislators

As e-mail became a mainstream form of communication, we often heard that legislative offices could not keep up with the large quantity of messages that they were receiving and that they were doubtful of their validity. As a result of a recent study, however, we have learned that technology is now in place to handle the increased volume of e-mails, and that personalized e-mails can actually have a lot of influence on some legislators' positions. Here are some tips for getting involved:

- Send detailed, personalized e-mails to your members of Congress' offices. As long as you include your name, address and zip code, the impact of specific legislation on your business and your reason for your position, e-mails are as well received as personal letters sent on letterhead.
- Quality is more persuasive than quantity. One well supported and rational argument can carry more weight than even hundreds of copies of an identical letter. When you use [www.VoteForBusiness.com](http://www.VoteForBusiness.com) to e-mail your members of Congress, make sure to edit our sample letter and provide your own comments.
- Know your audience.
- When we ask you to get involved on behalf of the business community, you can be assured that we have done research on your members of Congress' positions for you and have represented their views accurately. Two things often need to be pointed out to frustrated activists:
- Your message will not be processed unless you live in that legislator's district
- Staffers remember being insulted or bombarded by letters and will not help those people or organizations in the future.



# Elected Officials

**Senator Max Baucus**

Washington Office:  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
Phone: (202) 224-2651

Billings District Office:  
222 North 32nd Street, Suite 100  
Billings, MT 59101  
Phone: (406) 657-6790

**Governor Brian Schweitzer**

Capital Office:  
P.O. Box 200801  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620  
Phone: (406) 444-3111

**Representative Dennis Rehberg**

Washington Office:  
516 Cannon House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-3211

Billings District Office:  
1201 Grand Avenue, Suite 1  
Billings, MT 59012  
Phone (406) 256-1019

**Senator Jon Tester**

Washington Office:  
204 Russell Senate office Building  
Washington DC 20510-2604  
Phone: (202) 224-2644

Billings District Office:  
222 North 32nd Street, Suite 101  
Billings, MT 59101  
Phone: (406) 252-0550

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## AREA LEGISLATORS CONTACT INFORMATION

**MONTANA HOUSE:**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>E-Mail Address</b>
HD44	Bill Glaser	1402 Indian Creek Road	Huntley	R	<a href="mailto:glaser@mcn.net">glaser@mcn.net</a>
HD45	Tom Berry	Box 157	Roundup	R	
HD46	Ken Peterson	424 48 <sup>th</sup> Street West	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:kenneth59@bresnan.net">kenneth59@bresnan.net</a>
HD47	Dennis Himmelberger	Box 22272	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:dhimme1045@aol.com">dhimme1045@aol.com</a>
HD48	Wanda Grinde	1910 Bannack Drive	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:wsgrinde@aol.com">wsgrinde@aol.com</a>
HD49	Kendall Van Dyk	Box 441	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:kendallvandyk@gmail.com">kendallvandyk@gmail.com</a>
HD50	Tom McGillvray	3642 Donna Drive	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:tmcgillvray@bresnan.net">tmcgillvray@bresnan.net</a>
HD51	Robyn Driscoll	724 North 16 <sup>th</sup> Street	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:rdriscoll@peoplepc.com">rdriscoll@peoplepc.com</a>
HD52	Arlene Becker	1440 Lewis Avenue	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:arlene_becker@yahoo.com">arlene_becker@yahoo.com</a>
HD53	Elsie Arntzen	Box 22915	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:emarntzen@excite.com">emarntzen@excite.com</a>
HD54	Margie MacDonald	Box 245	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:macmargaret@gmail.com">macmargaret@gmail.com</a>
HD55	Cary Smith	5522 Billy Casper Drive	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:cary@bresnan.net">cary@bresnan.net</a>
HD56	Don Roberts	5414 Walter Hagen Drive	Billings	R	
HD57	Penny Morgan	3401 Waterloo Circle	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:pjm511@hotmail.com">pjm511@hotmail.com</a>
HD58	Krayton Kerns	1408 Golf Course Road	Laurel	R	<a href="mailto:krayton@kraytonkerns.org">krayton@kraytonkerns.org</a>
HD59	Paul Beck	Box 1315	Red Lodge	D	<a href="mailto:paul.rena@montana.net">paul.rena@montana.net</a>
HD60	David Howard	Box 129	Park City	R	<a href="mailto:d.howard@usadig.com">d.howard@usadig.com</a>

**MONTANA SENATE:**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>E-Mail Address</b>
SD22	Taylor Brown	775 Squaw Creek Road	Huntley	R	taylor@northernboradcasting.com
SD23	Kelly Gebhardt	Box 724	Roundup	R	<a href="mailto:gebby@midrivers.com">gebby@midrivers.com</a>
SD24	Kim Gillan	750 Judicial Avenue	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:glonky@aol.com">glonky@aol.com</a>
SD25	Roy Brown	Box 22273	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:brown.roy@bresnan.net">brown.roy@bresnan.net</a>
SD26	Lynda Moss	552 Highland Park Drive	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:lyndamoss@imt.net">lyndamoss@imt.net</a>
SD27	Gary Branae	415 Yellowstone	Billings	D	<a href="mailto:garybranae@gmail.com">garybranae@gmail.com</a>
SD28	Jeff Essmann	3130 MacMasters	Billings	R	<a href="mailto:jeff@jeffessmann.com">jeff@jeffessmann.com</a>
SD29	Dan McGee	1925 Pinyon Drive	Laurel	R	None
SD30	Robert Story	133 Valley Creek Road	Park City	R	None

Legislative website: [www.leg.state.mt.us/session.htm](http://www.leg.state.mt.us/session.htm)

For Legislative Information or to call a legislator: **1-406-444-4800**

To track specific bills log on to [http:// laws.leg.state.mt](http://laws.leg.state.mt)

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**YELLOWSTONE COUNTY OFFICIALS:**

Phone: 406-256-2701

Website: [co.yellowstone.mt.us](http://co.yellowstone.mt.us)

District 1 – Commissioner John Ostlund

District 2 – Commissioner Jim Reno

District 3 – Commissioner Bill Kennedy

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**BILLINGS CITY OFFICIALS:**

Phone: 406-657-8433 (City Council Information)

406-247-8678 (City Council Voice Mail)

Fax: 406-657-8390

**Mayor:** Ron Tussing

**City Council members:**

Ward 1:	Jim Ronquillo	Peggy Gaghen
Ward 2:	Denis Pitman	
Ward 3:	Vince Ruegamer	Chris “Shoots” Veis
Ward 4:	Jani McCall	Ed Ulledalen
Ward 5:	Mark Astle	Richard (Dick) Clark

**City Administrator:** Christina Volek



## BILLINGS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CONTACT INFORMATION

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Email Address</b>
John Brewer	President/CEO	john@billingschamber.com
Linda Gleason	Administrative Manager	linda@billingschamber.com
Joan Kronebusch	Director of Sales & Marketing/CVB	joan@billingschamber.com
Bruce MacIntyre	Director, Government Affairs	bruce@billingschamber.com
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Billings Chamber of Commerce  
Convention and Visitors Bureau



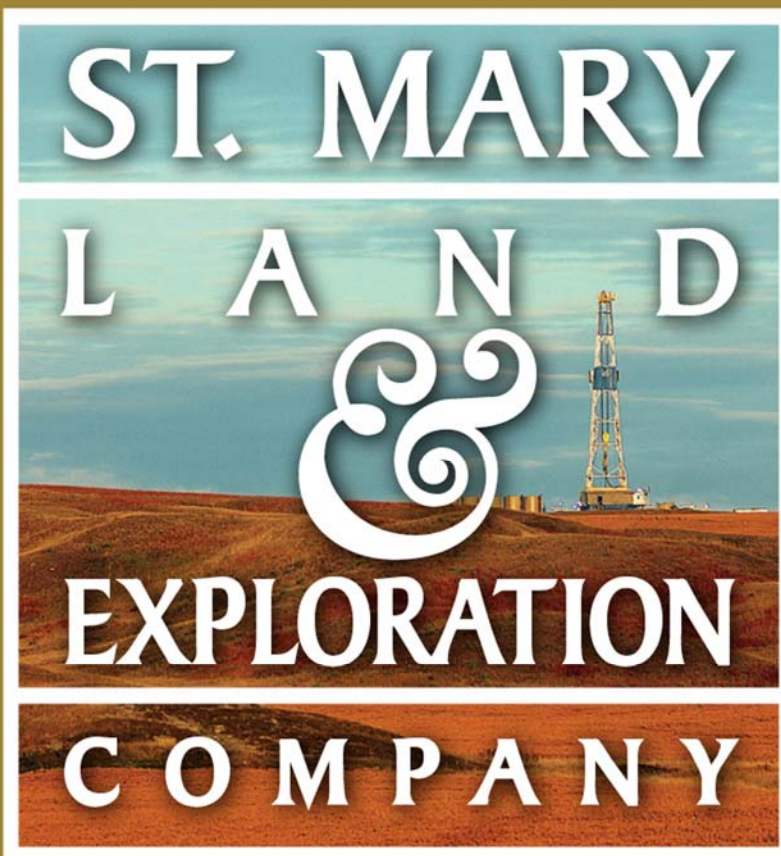
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### **Acknowledgements:**

<b>Allan Karell</b>	Chair, Government Affairs Committee 2007-2008
<b>Rick Burt</b>	Chair, Government Affairs Committee 2008-2009
<b>Tom Frisby</b>	Chair, Workforce/Business Development Committee
<b>Greg Kohn</b>	Chair, City Budget Review Task Force
<b>Dan Farmer</b>	Chair, Education Task Force
<b>Rick Reid</b>	Chair, Energy Task Force
<b>Mike Foster</b>	Chair, Healthcare Task Force
<b>John Greenfield</b>	Chair, Taxation Task Force
<b>Linda Gallagher</b>	Chair, Tourism Task Force
<b>Michael Sanderson</b>	Chair, Transportation/Managed Growth Task Force

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