

The Billings
Chamber of Commerce
Convention and Visitors Bureau
2011/2012





The Billings Chamber/CVB represents more than 1100 businesses across the region that employ over 44,000 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 crafted by our specific Task Forces and Committees, reviewed by our Government Affairs Committee, and carefully vetted by our board. Our mission is to publicly support policies that will facilitate economic growth in our community as well as throughout the state of Montana. We hope that you will take the time to become engaged in these issues.

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.

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 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.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "John Brewer". The signature is stylized and cursive.

John Brewer, CAE
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/CVB 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/CVB supports using the most efficient and effective means of providing government services by streamlining governmental services, and privatizing government services whenever effective, appropriate and economical.

The Chamber/CVB 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/CVB 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/CVB 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/CVB 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 support statewide tax reform, which may include a statewide general sales tax, as well as weighing the pros and cons of any such reform, 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 substantially 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 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.

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 previous sessions 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 opposes any changes in the Tax Increment Financing District rules and regulations as may be proposed by the Montana Department of Revenue or the legislature and supports being a part of any coalition that may be formed to oppose these changes in the rules and regulations. The Chamber will oppose laws or rules which may be proposed by the Montana Department of Revenue that limit or hamper cities' or counties' abilities to adopt and use Tax Increment Finance Districts and Business Improvement Districts.

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 if 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 substantial portion of the tax collected that is returned to the property owners as property tax relief.
4. A portion of the tax collected may 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. Additionally, the Chamber believes that a six year cycle for reappraisal is too long, and supports putting all property on a four year cycle for reappraisal, with approximately one fourth of all property reappraised each year. This would put reappraisal on a four year rolling cycle and should reduce costs for staff to complete the reappraisal each year.

Business Equipment Taxes

We support continuing reduction and elimination of the business equipment (personal property) tax as a part of a statewide tax reform package. The state now provides tax replacement to local governments that lose revenue from the equipment tax's elimination and the Chamber supports continuing the loss of revenue offset.

Session Potential Issues

In the previous Legislative sessions, 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 2011 session. While the Chamber will once again evaluate each proposal on its merits, we will continue to hold the same position if the proposals discussed below are submitted in the same form by the Department.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

The Chamber feels that this type of legislation would be a significant disincentive to business development in Montana and opposes this measure.

Abusive Tax Avoidance Transactions

Everyone should pay their fair share of taxes; however this has potential unintended consequences. The authority to determine what is “abusive” is too discretionary. Penalties may also be imposed for failure to report.

Withholding for Non-Resident Sales of Property

In 2007, the Department of Revenue estimated that there was 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 Chamber supports this legislation for withholding under the assumption that it not be expanded to include Montana residents and is limited in scope only to non-residents.

Grantor Trusts

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

Trust Tax Refunds

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 Chamber is opposed this type of 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 we oppose this type of legislation.

Clarify Confidentiality Laws

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



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 and fair power pricing will be established. We believe that increasing the supply of energy in Montana, including oil, coal, methane, wind, fuel cells, gas, solar and alternative methods will help 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. Streamlining the permitting process and limiting the appeals process for both production and transportation systems related to energy development is critical.

Specific Issues

Responsible Energy Exploration and Development

Responsible energy exploration and development on public and private lands is crucial to resolving our nation's energy crisis and building Montana's economy.

Natural Gas Development

The Chamber believes that natural gas development should be explored and may be beneficial to stimulating the state's economy. We recognize that coal bed natural gas is an abundant resource that holds great potential for development. Other sources for natural gas include landfills, sewage treatment and animal waste. We will support legislative efforts that seek to encourage environmentally responsible 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, unless in a public-private partnership, must be subject to the most stringent cost benefit analysis to the stakeholders.

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. 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 healthcare industry is facing serious workforce shortages and through educational partnerships we can enhance our recruitment and retention efforts, as well as educate, train, and provide degree advancement opportunities. The healthcare 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 healthcare 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 dependents, 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 healthcare services.
- Education of consumers about healthy lifestyle choices, insurance coverage options, and appropriate access to healthcare services.
- The care, safety, and treatment of our most vulnerable citizens: children, the elderly, and disabled.
- A viable private and public healthcare 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.
- Tax exempt status of not-for-profit healthcare/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 are 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 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

Reform

Now that Congress and President Obama have enacted broad healthcare reform, we believe that many resulting challenges must be addressed. As we move into implementation of this law, there is a shared responsibility. What aspects of reform work as intended, where there are unintended consequences and what aspects need legislative change will likely be an ongoing process for many years into the future.

Reimbursements

We believe in fair government reimbursements to healthcare 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. For instance, uncompensated care resulting from uninsured patients inappropriately using a hospital's Emergency Department as their Primary Care access point is a very costly source of cost shifting. 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 healthcare 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 healthcare coverage, it is essential to make it easier for employers and their employees to afford the healthcare coverage they need and the quality they deserve.

Consumer Education

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

Regulations

Governmental regulations of the healthcare industry, though well-intended, significantly drive up the costs of providing healthcare 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 healthcare industry. Increased use of IT and Tele-Medicine will lower costs while increasing efficiency and access, especially in rural areas. In particular, the Chamber supports the ongoing efforts of HealthShare Montana that is developing interconnectivity among Montana's healthcare providers.

Administration

A major source of cost savings would be streamlining the delivery of healthcare 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 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. An important aspect of the strategy should be strengthened linkage between healthcare and the MSUB 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 healthcare 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 healthcare 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 contract 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. To encourage tech transfer in the biosciences, we support State funding of match money for SBIR grants, which was approved during the 2009 legislative session.

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. The Chamber supports development of a mechanism to access federal dollars for workforce training and equipment, including onetime needs and new programs. Training for incumbent and entry-level healthcare workers should be considered. Also, in rural areas there should be examination of potentially using alternate types of providers offering healthcare services, such as nurse practitioners.

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 healthcare workforce. The Chamber supports state and federal subsidization to realize affordable housing.

Mental Health

The Chamber supports improved government payment for mental health services, which would benefit both providers and patients.

Community Crisis Center

We support the Community Crisis Center, a healthcare safety net facility aimed at evaluating people 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. Passage of the public safety mill levy in June 2010 should provide financial stability for the CCC, and efforts should continue to obtain funding from state and federal sources.

Public Health and Safety

The federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provides significant new funding to improve health, save money and reduce demands on our health system via the creation of the Prevention and Public Health Fund. The best way for Montana to capitalize on Fund resources is to invest in public health service delivery across the state. During the 2009 legislative session, the legislature began to address inequities in the public health system by passing HB 173, a demonstration project that will help ensure a strong foundation for local public health through national accreditation. The Chamber supports the continuation of building a strong public health infrastructure as well as a fiscally responsible approach in the creation of policies, programs and services which keep people healthier now, thus reducing the demand for medical care throughout their lives. These include evidence-based interventions such as:

- Chronic disease risk reduction measures via tobacco use prevention, physical activity promotion and sound nutrition policy;
- Promoting seatbelt use;
- Modernizing and strengthening remedies for substance-related and distracted driving abuses; and
- Increasing immunization rates.

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 and level of funding 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 transportation infrastructure, including runways and terminals, to facilitate the ongoing increase in passenger miles and the expected growth of air cargo.
- 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. East End Entrance to Billings from Interstate 90, Exit 452
- b. Inner Belt Loop/Zimmerman Trail
- c. Montana Highway 3 (Billings to Great Falls)
- d. Interstate 90
- e. S. Billings Blvd/King Avenue E.
- f. King Ave. West
- g. Main Street in the Heights.

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.

City-County Planning

The Chamber supports the 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 Chamber supports actively pursuing alternative sources of revenue for cities and towns through the legislative process.
2. The Chamber supports City annexation of new development areas 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.

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.

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. The Chamber also feels that there is a need to develop a comprehensive trail system for the economic and healthy community benefits that result from active transportation (to work and school and for leisure), and communicate the quality of life and economic benefits to the business community and general public. We need to bring trail support groups and stakeholders together to find solutions to connect our trails and keep them clean and safe. We will seek federal support through transportation and appropriations bills.

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 also supports the continuation of Essential Air Service 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.



WORKFORCE/BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that a successful business is a joint effort among ownership, management, and labor. 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

Medical Marijuana

The Billings Chamber is very concerned about the unintended consequences of the passage of the medical marijuana referendum several years ago. Complete repeal of this referendum should be our first and foremost consideration, and the legislature should realize that the law that was passed was not the intent of the voting public. If complete repeal is not enacted, then we support the right of the employer to make a determination if an employee is fit for work. The rights of both the employer and the employee need to be considered if testing becomes an issue; however the rights of the employer need to be protected. If medical marijuana will continue to be allowed, we feel that there should be a reauthorization of user cards on an annual basis, based on a thorough review of the user's medical records by a qualified physician to determine the continued need. New card applicants also should go through a thorough review of their medical history, have a licensed healthcare provider complete a thorough examination, and show a demonstrated medical need. Licensing, which must include all aspects of the licensing and distribution system, should not be done without an in-depth background check, licenses should be issued annually at a substantial fee, and should be non-transferrable. There also should be some method of determining the quality and strength of the product being sold, and some determination should be made regarding who is allowed to grow medical marijuana. Finally, Montana has passed a clean indoor air act, and legislation should be crafted to amend this law to include healthcare facilities and the healthcare facility's campus that is subject to a smoke-free campus policy.

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 previous legislatures. Furthermore, we support expanding 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 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.

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. The Billings Chamber encourages employer/employee participation in programs that promote safety in the workplace such as SafeMT.

Wages

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

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 Billings Chamber proposes exploring venture capital fund financial packages through the use of tax credits and tax dollars, to help small Montana businesses.

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 small business.
- Encourage passage of business tax provisions that would provide for the permanency of business expensing allowances (Section 179), the reauthorization of the death tax at a rate the same or lower than the 2009 rate, with the goal of the eventual 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, and will 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.
- Extends the current 8 month limit on temporary workforce visas to a term of 1 to 2 years to make us competitive with other countries like Canada.

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 of 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.



TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber/Convention and Visitors Bureau believes that tourism is a vital part of the Billings economy and directly generates \$600 million each year in non-resident expenditures, brings around one million visitors to our area 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

Tourism Promotion

The Chamber/CVB realizes that state tourism promotion funding is inadequate. The Chamber/CVB 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/CVB supports substantial reform to the rules and regulations administered through the state Tourism Advisory Council. The Chamber/CVB opposes additional use of the bed tax funds for infrastructure, or any reductions to local marketing agencies such as the Chamber/CVB. Any attempt to reallocate or increase the bed tax for any purpose other than the promotion of tourism will be vigorously opposed. The 3% general fund lodging tax should be allocated specifically to state tourism with a portion granted to regions and CVBs. The Chamber/CVB opposes any changes, additions or deletions to the current Tourism Business Improvement District laws that are now in place.

Incentives

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

MetraPark

MetraPark is a vital part of the tourism infrastructure and the Chamber/CVB believes this 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.
- 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.
-

Potential East End Hospitality Corridor and City Entrance

The Billings Chamber/CVB recommends that consideration be given to developing the East End entrance to Billings through way finding signage, beautification, aesthetic landscaping and ease of access.

Convention Center

The Billings Chamber/CVB recommends that a feasibility study be considered to determine any potential need, size and location of a convention center.

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.

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 period greater than 8 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 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 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 MSUBillings, MSUBillings College of Technology, and Rocky Mountain College and get both high school and college credit has the potential to alleviate some overcrowding in the high schools and increase attendance at MSUBillings, MSUBillings College of Technology, and Rocky Mountain College.

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 numerous 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 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.

- 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 Rocky Mountain College and Montana State University Billings is particularly essential to success in this area.

- 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.

- 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 ensure 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.



AGRICULTURE

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that an economically strong Agriculture Industry is a vital part of the growth and sustainability of our overall economy. With that belief, the Chamber pledges to protect the property rights of those involved in production agriculture. Inherent in these rights are the right to pass property from generation to generation without taxation or penalty.

The Chamber supports movement toward a taxation system built on the premise of low flat and fair tax assessment. This is founded in the belief that special incentives, while they may benefit a small sector of the economy, result in higher taxes for all.

Given the fact that Production Agriculture is closely tied to land usage and stewardship, the Chamber supports the development of natural resources in a manner that is both economically viable and environmentally sustainable for the long term.

These resources include the following:

- Water and the right to water usage and perpetuation of water rights granted decades ago. In addition, the Chamber supports water quality regulations that are founded in need for economically sustainable production.
- Development of energy related resources including petroleum, coal and natural gas along with renewable energy from wind, solar and hydropower resources. Support of this development includes not only discovery and production but extends to transportation systems and distribution systems for these resources.
- We support balancing the rights of Agricultural Producers as they relate to the protection of livestock from the threats of wildlife disease transmission and predatory attacks balanced with the economic benefit gained from the wildlife itself in the form of hunting income and tourism income.

Prior to the start of the 2011 Montana legislative session as well as during the session, the Chamber will consult with and maintain an active involvement with the various state agriculture organizations to determine issues of importance to the agriculture community. It will communicate these areas of concern to the membership, seek input, and determine an appropriate course of action as needed.

Specific Issues

Water Resource Management:

Water Rights Protection

The Chamber believes that there should be no dilution of water rights and, if anything, these rights should be reaffirmed and strengthened. During the past two sessions of the legislature there have been a number of pieces of legislation dealing with water rights and the Chamber will monitor bill draft requests, proposed and introduced legislation and plan a strategy to deal with issues as they come forth.

Regulations regarding Exempt Water Wells

The Chamber believes that individual property rights need to be protected and agricultural use water well development should be exempted from any laws designed to regulate water rights and wells for subdivisions.

Water Quality and Soil Quality Issues

The Billings Chamber feels that Montana's existing law should be maintained and supports state's rights to make these determinations.

Water Marketing

The Billings Chamber will oppose any attempt to pass legislation that will dilute our rights.

Land Use:

Private land purchases by the state of Montana.

Protecting the rights of property owners is fundamental to the success of a free market economic system, and is an important cornerstone upon which our nation was founded. A strong local economy depends on preserving the right of responsible individuals to freely own, use and transfer real property. There should be no net loss of private land to state ownership.

Riverbed ownership

With the recent court case ruling that the state of Montana owns the riverbed under the PPL dams and owes rental money to the state, the issue becomes broader for private property owners with land adjacent to navigable rivers regarding ownership. This also has the potential to extend to non-navigable rivers. Any attempt to broaden this issue beyond what the courts have already determined should be vigorously opposed.

Wildlife Management:

Wild Bison

The Chamber opposes the concept of wild, free roaming bison and the ability of bison or any other alternative livestock to move freely from location to location. Our belief is that this would be taking property rights from private landholders, and will adversely affect public safety.

Responsibility for Diseased Wildlife

The Chamber believes that the responsibility for the management of diseased elk and bison should be managed in such a manner that agricultural producers will not be adversely affected.

No reduction in “Outfitter Preference” licenses for Non-Resident Hunters

We believe that the current allocation of outfitter preference licenses is marginally adequate to meet the needs and should not be reduced.

Agriculture Business Development

We believe that research stations such as the Southern Agriculture Research Center Experimental Station at Huntley provide a valuable service to the Billings area in particular and the state of Montana in general when it comes to agriculture production. We support continued operation of these experimental stations at or greater than the current level of funding and will oppose any attempt to reduce their funding or scope of work. We also support the continuation of the Extension Service Programs at or above current staffing and funding levels. Finally, we support the continuation of Agriculture Education at all levels, from K-12 through college and encourage higher education to expand and develop new programs and classes as new technology is developed.



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

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

To track specific bills log on to <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 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. 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 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, 2011

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 \$9.00 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 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:
2448 Rayburn 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:
724 Hart 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

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY OFFICIALS:

Phone: 406-256-2701
Website: co.yellowstone.mt.us
District 1 – Commissioner John Ostlund
District 2 – Commissioner Jim Reno
District 3 – Commissioner Bill Kennedy

BILLINGS CITY OFFICIALS:

Phone: 406-657-8433 (City Council Information)
406-247-8678 (City Council Voice Mail)
Fax: 406-657-8390

Mayor: Tom Hanel

City Council members:

Ward 1:	Jim Ronquillo	Peggy Gaghen
Ward 2:	Denis Pitman	Angela Cimmino
Ward 3:	Vince Ruegamer	Richard McFadden
Ward 4:	Jani McCall	Ed Ulledalen
Ward 5:	Mark Astle	Richard (Dick) Clark

City Administrator: Christina Volek

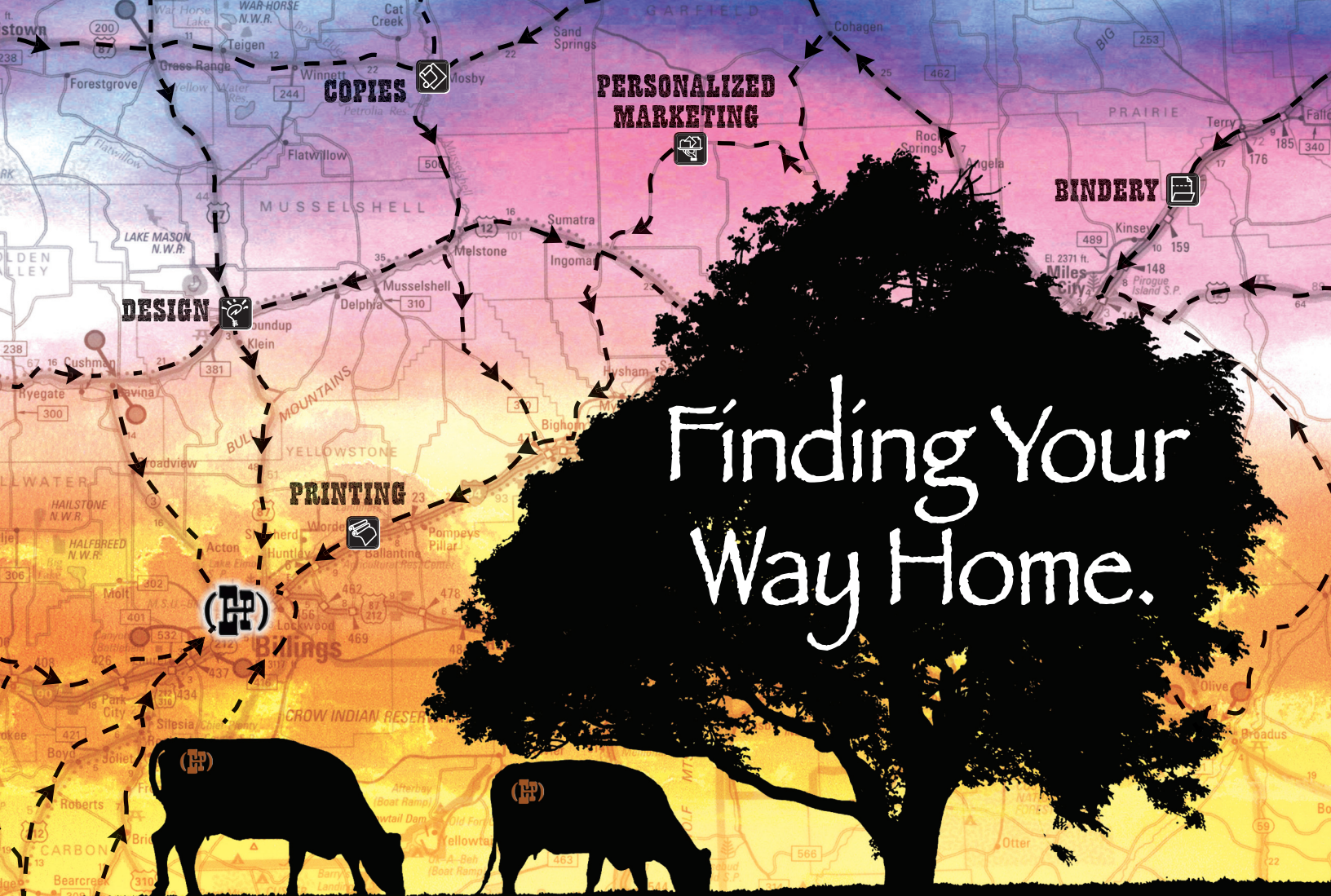
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Acknowledgements:

Greg Kohn	Chair, Government Affairs Committee
Lyle Hill	Chair, Agriculture Committee
Rick Reid	Chair, Energy Task Force
Mike Foster	Chair, Healthcare Task Force
John Greenfield	Chair, Taxation Task Force
Chris Johnson	Chair, Tourism Task Force
Tom Frisby	Chair, Workforce/Business Development Committee Transportation/Managed Growth Task Force Education Task Force



Finding Your Way Home.

Specializing in Stock Sale Ads & Books

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Big Signs
Newsletters
Envelopes
Forms
Tags

Postcards
Small Signs
Letterhead
Brochures
Notecards
Flyers



We're the Brand for all your printing needs.

2007
Top 100
QUICK PRINTING

**Econo
Print**

ESTABLISHED 1969
100% Locally Owned & Operated

Downtown

3211 1st Avenue North
Billings, MT 59101
(406) 252-7191
Fax: (406) 252-7192

Westend

111 South 24th Street West
Billings, MT 59102
(406) 652-1176
Fax: (406) 652-1180