

GOVERNMENT/ADVOCACY STATEMENT

Where We Stand

The Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce is the largest member-driven organization of area businesses in Western Montana and is the primary advocate for business and industry in the community. The Chamber has a responsibility for supporting an economically vibrant business environment that includes responsible growth initiatives that will provide all community citizens with the opportunity to maintain and improve their individual lifestyles. This responsibility is reflected in our Mission Statement and requires the Chamber to professionally and assertively *advocate for business* by influencing the development and implementation of public policy throughout Western Montana.

The following Government/Advocacy Statement was developed by Chamber Members and staff, and is fully supported by the Board of Directors. The Statement represents the Chamber's commitment to its Members, as well as all area citizens and businesses. It is strongly believed that positive business interests, and the richness and growth of individual and family lifestyles, can and should be mutually supported.

Sincerely,

Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce

Monte Turner
President 05-06

Kim Latrielle
CEO

Julie Gemar Williams
President-Elect 06-07

Mission Statement:

*“An association providing community leadership
and business advocacy sustaining economic vitality”*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Overview	Page 3
2. Local Government	Page 4

3. Revenue and Taxation	Page 4
4. Education	Page 5
5. Healthcare	Page 5
6. Natural Resource and Environment	Page 6
7. Correction System	Page 7
8. Justice	Page 8
9. Labor and Employment	Page 8
10. Transportation	Page 9
11. Growth and Development	Page 10

Overview

The Chamber's Mission Statement includes "*enhance the quality of life of the community through a healthy business climate*". In support of this, it is believed that a healthy business climate can only be created and maintained by influencing the development and implementation of public policy at all appropriate levels. The Chamber supports maintaining governance at the local level, i.e. keeping government influence at the city, county and state level versus federal mandate that has significant disconnect to Western Montana business and the "Montana" lifestyle. With local governance having great effect on the business environment in the Greater Missoula Area, it is understood that the Chamber will advocate for business with all appropriate public bodies and will monitor government actions with an eye to improving the general business climate of the Area.

The Chamber's policy towards Government/Advocacy is guided by the following expectations:

- Government should provide a strong infrastructure that promotes economic growth and prosperity through the creation of private sector jobs and quality standards of living.
- Government should support entrepreneurship, the promotion of free trade, and adopt and maintain policies that provide economic growth and prosperity of business and industry to the benefit of area citizens.
- Government should provide stability in policies (business can constructively deal with a reasonable volume of laws, regulations and taxes when they are clear, consistent, equitably enforced, and sensitive to the realities of a market-driven economy).
- Government should provide efficient and timely delivery of services and remain accountable to the taxpaying public for such performance.
- Government should be diligent in its understanding of business-related issues through 1) providing access to government officials and staff, 2) being responsive and cooperating with business on matters of mutual concern, and 3) creation and promotion of business-to-government councils, forums, and methods whereby business and government are educated about the issues effecting each other.
- Government should provide accurate and timely information about issues that affect our families and our businesses.

In order to support its Mission, the Chamber will increase awareness of its members relative to governmental bodies and officials' policies, actions, positions, issues and legislative matters relating to business by educational forums on candidates and legislative matters, distributing educational and informative materials to its members, appearing and providing input and comment at public meetings, and, encouraging its members, business people, and citizens that support the mutual best interests of business and the community, to run for public office.

The Chamber will take active stands, within the constraints of its non-profit status, on issues affecting business, including the rating, and/or scoring of political candidates for its members and the encouragement of its members and the business community to support responsible, pro-business candidates.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that government, no matter at what level, has an obligation to operate efficiently and openly. Local government should pursue coordination, consolidation, and privatization of duties, regulations, and licensing whenever it supports the best interests of citizens and the business community.

Governmental should conduct its business on a competitive basis. Local government should give preference on contracts for goods and services to local business.

As citizens and as a business community, we should not grant rule-making authority lightly, or completely, to governmental agencies. We reserve the right to involve ourselves in rule-making decisions.

REVENUE & TAXATION POLICY

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber supports economic growth through the creation of positive economic policies, including tax incentives. When responsibly planned, economic growth through business and job creation will create required revenues to support infrastructure growth and required services. The goal is to expand the economy and maintain an efficient governmental process. Tax policy should provide adequate funding for necessary government services. Growth in government should never be greater than business and economic growth in the community. Taxes, and fees for required governmental services, should be equitable, clear, not in a constant state of flux, and collectable.

In order to create and maintain a vibrant and growing business and industrial sector in the Missoula Area, government must recognize that the entire business community is impacted by competitiveness from states and countries outside Montana. Governmental revenues raised through taxes must be competitive with adjoining states and be sensitive to the realities of a global marketplace. We support:

- Reduction and elimination of the business equipment (personal property) tax
- Reduction of personal income
- Permanent elimination of state and federal "estate taxes"
- Local Option Sales Taxes implemented solely upon a public vote
- Legislative efforts to reduce the Montana tax rate on capital gains

EDUCATION

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber supports education funding for innovation, educational and technical proficiency, continuous improvement processes, and a safe classroom/campus environment that actively encourages the learning process. The business community is a stakeholder in the end product of public education and the Chamber encourages business involvement in all aspects of public education, including partnering and mentoring programs with schools.

In return for funding an efficient and scholastically respected public education system, we believe our public school system must:

- Provide a well-educated workforce that can support new industries, technologies and business development;
- Provide supplemental training for existing work forces;
- Solve specific skill-based business challenges; and
- Support economic development and encourage the growth of industry in Missoula and Western Montana

The Chamber recommends that the Montana Board of Regents adopt a policy by which all Montana public post-secondary, public institutions adopt a curriculum that allows ready transferability of basic core course credits among each of the state units. The Chamber further recommends 1) consolidating school calendars, and 2) continuation of a formal long-range capital building plan for the University system.

The University of Montana is an integral part of our community and investment in its infrastructure is critical to its continuation and the prosperity of Western Montana.

HEALTHCARE

Basic Philosophy

The Montana healthcare system needs ongoing evaluation and change in relationship to the affordability of medical benefit packages for small businesses and self-employed individuals. Double-digit premium increases, ongoing addition of insurance mandates and the lack of effective regulations and competitive plan options have made it difficult for businesses to provide affordable medical packages to employees. The Chamber encourages reviews of the total medical care system which includes providers, insurance companies, government programs and legislative, administrative and rule-making bodies with the goal of increasing affordable healthcare packages for small businesses. Because healthcare benefits play an important role in a businesses' ability

to recruit and retain talented employees, the Chamber supports programs and legislative initiatives that will increase the accessibility and availability of healthcare to small and start-up businesses, and will advocate for positive change.

Employer-sponsored health plans cover a large percentage of insured citizens in Montana. In order to remain competitive within Montana and from outside the state in our world economy, the Chamber supports the following positions on healthcare topics:

- Opposition to legislative efforts and rule-making options that impose mandated benefits, increased regulations, or expand litigation that would lead to increased costs of healthcare and onerous costs to employers and employees;
- Legislation that will make it more affordable for businesses in Montana to retain or begin offering coverage for employees;
- Tax credits that serve as targeted, market-based mechanisms to expand access to healthcare benefits;
- Vigorously oppose any legislation that could lead to dramatic increases in healthcare costs, such as expanding employers' liability or "increased patient rights";
- Encouraging plan enrollees to sue their health care provider or employer is not in the best interest of an efficient and affordable system;
- Ongoing reform measures that cap pain and suffering awards dependents receive, and set fee caps for attorneys in these cases, thereby, reducing doctor's liability costs, and expediting the settlement process, while providing patients with appropriate awards for pain and suffering;
- We further support greater efficiencies and accuracies in the delivery of health care by providers; and
- The encouragement of healthcare plans that cover preventative measures and encourages employers and employees to take advantage of preventative measures that reduce more serious medical claims later in life. It is a fact that "prevention" saves small businesses money and resources as well as saves employee non-medical expenses while off-work.

NATURAL RESOURCES/ENVIRONMENT

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber recognizes that Montana and the Missoula Valley has been blessed with abundant and varied natural resources. Healthy forests, fertile farmland, abundant

wildlife, and huge mineral resources provide our citizens with a wide array of tools to enhance their lives and generate prosperous livelihoods. The Chamber believes in the complementary goals of 1) enhancing our lives and surrounding environment, and 2) responsibly managing our natural resources in a manner that creates opportunities for our children and subsequent generations to live, work and prosper. These goals can support a business climate of vibrant growth and prosperity through effective policy planning, and consistent implementation of laws and regulations that are developed in open governmental processes.

The Chamber supports the following:

- Recognition of the basic value of American business and industry in maintaining and furthering our high quality of life;
- Natural resource production and manufacturing is a vital component of our Montana economy;
- Reasonable environmental laws and regulations that provide clear requirements for business, as well as defined timelines for governmental review;
- Consistent enforcement of laws and regulations; and
- Vigorous opposition to any natural resource/environmental legislation or regulations that impedes entrepreneurship and the promotion of free trade without valid scientific justification and a clear and irrefutable assessment of detriment to the environment (supported via Congress' mandate under the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act).

CORRECTION SYSTEM

Basic Philosophy

Business entrepreneurship, economic growth and the promotion of free trade cannot be conducted when basic human safety is in question. Therefore, the Chamber supports the following in order to support a community that is attractive to outside investment and business growth:

- Government must provide basic services that ensure the physical well-being of all citizens without unduly limiting individual freedoms and the ability to conduct business and sustain a vibrant economy;
- Individuals or collective concerns that violate laws by infringing upon the rights of people or property should be subjected to correction and/or rehabilitation. Those who cannot be corrected or rehabilitated should be incarcerated in the most cost-effective way, with an emphasis on prevention of future infractions;
- Victims' rights are paramount and 1) seizure of assets, and 2) work-release of the convicted, are tools that enable restitution;
- Private run prisons, if cost effective, should be an alternative to public institutions.

JUSTICE

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes in a civil justice system that is open and accessible to all citizens and provides full compensation for genuine injury, while limiting frivolous litigation. No party should be required to pay a disproportionate share of damages merely because of that party's ability to pay. Apportionment of liability should include settled or released parties, or in the alternative, a system of several liability. A judge or jury should be able to award less than 100% damages to a party.

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

Basic Philosophy

Successful business is a mutually supportive relationship among ownership, management, and employees, without prejudice. The business must be responsive to the physical and professional needs of employees, including providing a work environment that is safe, drug-free, and non-discriminatory. Free market forces play a strong role in establishing and maintaining a positive employer/employee relationship. The Chamber supports:

- Allowing market forces to set wage and benefit levels (we oppose mandated increases in the state minimum wage level or the creation of “livable wage” ordinances/legislation due to their negative impact on competitiveness with businesses outside of our area);
- Clarification and expansion of 1999 legislation to allow universal drug and alcohol testing of employees, with proper procedures established to safeguard the innocent;
- “Right to work” legislative initiatives that provide employees the option to decide whether or not to belong to a union as a condition of employment; thereby improving Montana’s chances of recruiting new businesses, and the jobs they create, to the area;
- Development of a workforce training fund to be used to help offset the cost of training individuals for newly created “base industry sector” jobs, or an industry which creates wealth in a community by selling its goods or services outside the immediate service area;
- The exclusive remedy doctrine for workplace as applicable to Workmen’s Compensation Insurance
- Prompt delivery of reasonable and appropriate benefits to a worker who, in the scope and course of employment, has suffered an injury as the result of a workplace accident;

- Elimination of the adversarial approach to safety, accident prevention, and rehabilitation. Workplace safety is the shared responsibility of employers and employees;
- Pursuit and prosecution of worker's compensation fraud, regardless of whether perpetrated by an employee or an employer;
- The Chamber opposes legislation that would mandate new requirements on business, financial and otherwise, which would lead to closing down business operations, without serious efforts to mitigate the negative affects to the business and the area.

TRANSPORTATION

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber recognizes that an effective and integrated transportation infrastructure is an integral part of the foundation of a healthy economy. Transportation systems must economically and safely facilitate the movement of goods and people throughout our community. As the demand for all modes of transportation services grows in Missoula, access to competitive regional, national, and international markets, regardless of weather, seasons or local conditions, is essential to the economic growth of the business community.

The Chamber supports the following:

- Chamber of Commerce board of director's involvement in the selection process for appointment to technical and policy-making committees at all levels of the transportation planning process;
- Active participation by the Chamber President and CEO in the public comment processes required by federal law in the transportation planning process, especially where these comments support the economic growth of the business community as determined by the chamber board of directors;
- Transportation planning and policies that optimize funding for infrastructure improvements including inner city travel ways and the continued coordination and improvement of signal lights to facilitate traffic flow;
- Land use planning that is coordinated with long-range transportation planning in the Missoula Urban Area and comprehensive in regard to business and industrial opportunities throughout the urban area;
- Chamber involvement in the research and selection process of local funding mechanisms enacted to overcome transportation funding shortages in order to assure that these mechanisms are not detrimental to business opportunities and economic growth; and

- Advocating for additional transportation funds for the State of Montana at the national level.

Growth and Development

Basic Philosophy

The Chamber believes that it is important for economic vitality and that communities flourish best when they offer a high quality of life at a reasonable cost. Livable communities offer a viable business sector, nearby employment opportunities, a variety of affordable housing choices, safe neighborhoods, quality public services, good schools, efficient transportation systems, and the infrastructure that provides the framework.

Governments should encourage quality growth through a predictable governmental process and policies that sufficiently fund the infrastructure needs such as roads, water and sewer that lay the groundwork for growth and development in all sectors of our local economies. Governments should plan for growth and development and ensure there is adequate land with zoning and infrastructure available to provide for the future of our community.

We believe we can build better communities by supporting quality growth and development and seeking economic and housing opportunities that embrace the environmental qualities we value, while protecting private property rights.

Approved September 16th, 2005 Chamber Board meeting