

City of Billings
2013 Montana Legislative Priorities
November 1, 2012

Finance & Taxation

Predicting a \$250 million general fund shortfall for the biennium, the 2011 Legislature cut or flat-lined current program spending and reduced funding to local governments. The State's General Fund for the 2013 biennium will end with a surplus of over \$400 million. Surplus or not, the State budget will be THE issue for the 2013 Legislature. Local governments sacrificed to help the State balance its budget and to produce the predicted surplus. The Legislature should acknowledge that sacrifice and help local governments improve their financial conditions. Billings will oppose any Legislative attempts to balance the State's budget by again decreasing shared revenues or transferring costs to local governments.

- Entitlement Program: Support the current entitlement funding program and payments.
- Property Tax Reappraisal: Support a shorter reappraisal cycle; support a more easily understood method to establish taxable values; support expedited resolution of tax protests and valuation appeals; oppose inequitable mitigation.
- Tax Increment Finance: Support continued local authority; oppose removal of the 95 School Equalization mills from the increment levy or other reductions in increment; oppose law or regulation changes that reduce local control or impede district creation and management.
- Oil, Gas and Coal Production Impacts: Support distribution of existing taxes or authority for new, locally adopted taxes or fees that help cities and towns deal with the impacts of resource extraction.
- Public Employee Pension Plans: Support additional employer contributions up to 1% of payroll. If additional funds are needed, they should come from higher employee contributions or from the State's budget surplus.
- Local option: Support legislation that allows local governments and their voters to determine the form of taxes and the services that meet their needs.

Land Use, Property & Environmental Regulation

The City of Billings supports laws that protect the environment and our citizens' quality of life.

- Support legislation that reduces the expected financial burden of implementing the wastewater nutrient loading legislation and rules (2009 - SB 95).
- Support appropriate Subdivision Reviews and Exemptions, including clarifying the "land for sale or lease" exemption.

Local Government Powers

The City of Billings strongly supports local control and self governing powers. The City will resist legislative proposals and agency policies that would substitute state authority for local control.

- Medical Marijuana: Support specific authority for local governments to regulate and zone Medical Marijuana businesses and support adoption of limited State controls.

Public Health, Safety & City Employee Relations

The City of Billings values its employees and supports State legislation that improves worker safety and protects employees' long term financial well being. Those protections must be within the City's financial capacity and should not jeopardize the City's ability to continue providing safe, convenient and effective public services. The City consistently supports state and local laws that protect public safety.

- Workers Compensation: Support legislation that reduces rates while providing adequate medical care for workers who are injured on the job; oppose presumptive illnesses legislation.
- Mental Health: Support state payment of costs for Municipal Court ordered evaluations.
- Intersection Safety: Support clarification of "red light" duties for vehicles.
- Generally support DUI law reform.
- Support Wildland Urban Interface fire protection measures.
- Safety Belt Law: Support primary enforcement; support repealing 61-13-106 MCA (plaintiff responsibility in civil litigation).
- Handheld communication devices: Support statewide use restrictions while driving a vehicle.

Regional & Community Coalitions & Partnerships

The City of Billings supports Legislative initiatives that enhance our community, regional, private and public partners to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

- Support, in general, for the Public Policies proposed by the Billings Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Support, in general, for the Montana League of Cities & Towns Legislative Resolutions.
- Support changes in school district funding for urban schools.
- Support the State Library Commission budget proposals that assist local governments with providing public library services.
- Develop coalitions of mutual interest parties: City, Chamber, County, Hospitals, MSU-B, Big Sky EDA and School Districts.

Prepared by:

Ed Bartlett, City of Billings Lobbyist
Phone: 652-1373; Cell: (406) 431-6014
Email: edbartlett@q.com

And

Bruce McCandless, Assistant City Administrator
Phone: 657-8222; Cell (406) 690-3062
Email: mccandlessb@ci.billings.mt.us