



2025

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES --- & AGENDA

KALISPELLCHAMBER.COM



MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



Lorraine Clarno,
President/CEO
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce



Erica Wirtala,
Government Affairs Chair
NW Montana Association of Realtors



The Kalispell Chamber of Commerce focuses on developing and enhancing the economic vitality of the Flathead Valley. We are a non-partisan member-driven organization, representing 660 small businesses, large employers, and nonprofits operating in the Flathead County area and 25,000+ employees. Serving as the voice of business is central to our mission, via our role as an advocate and a trusted source of information for the business community. We seek to build a business-friendly Flathead County and City of Kalispell that allows businesses to fully compete for customers and market share based on the goods and services they provide. The Kalispell Chamber's legislative strategy is to support policy proposals that fit our mission and oppose measures that detract from our goals. The Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and Government Affairs Committee uses these broad criteria when determining positions on policy issues. We strive to ensure elected officials, government staff, and other community leaders are aware of the concerns of the business community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Promote policies that enable businesses of all sizes to thrive and grow.
- **INCLUSIVITY:** Engage and listen to business stakeholders on policies that impact how employers operate.
- **COLLABORATION:** Collaboratively develop policies with a willingness to consider alternative paths and compromise agreements.
- **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Prioritize state and federal spending based on outcomes and results to create a balanced and stable budget.
- **COMMUNITY:** As a business organization we recognize our important role in growing and supporting a healthy and vibrant community.

While we have been engaged and active in policy formation and worked closely with our elected officials, this Agenda will allow us to be proactive in connecting our legislators to our immediate and top priorities to help guide them in their decision making.

We, the business community, are the foundation of a vibrant economy from which a high quality of life is derived. If business is strong, our community will be strong.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Clarno & Erica Wirtala



TAXATION

We believe in efficient and cost-conscious limited government.

- Support increasing the business equipment tax exemption from \$1 million to \$3 million.
- Support long-term tax reform which may include income tax and property tax relief, including the reduction on primary residences and for Montana small businesses.
- Promote the growth of Montana's travel industry by supporting funding and policies that enhance tourism promotion and infrastructure, ensuring a sustainable visitor economy for the state.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We believe Government should establish policies that provide incentives to foster a competitive business environment to increase growth and development opportunities. Fostering the growth of family-wage jobs is vital.

- We support the expansion of the Montana Trades Education Credit for employers to send their employees to learn a trade.
- Preserving community access to TIF funds as a valuable economic development resource to spur catalytic public/private partnerships resulting in job creation and increased property values.
- We oppose land use preemption legislation that takes local decision making from counties and cities to develop long-term housing solutions for their areas and inhibits innovative & individualized community growth management plans.
- We support legislation that enables robust and healthy agriculture and forest production in Montana.
- We support liquor license reform that addresses the shortfall of licenses in tourism communities which are extremely limited during heightened visitation months and support extended hours of service for craft brewers.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

We believe everyone in Montana should have the right skills to fill the jobs of today and have the ability and opportunity to adapt for the jobs of tomorrow. The demographic shift to a significant aging population and an increasing demand for skilled workforce across industry sectors requires a concerted community approach to workforce development efforts.

- We support state funding for programs that help increase workplace readiness, adult education, and workforce certification programs.
- We support incentives for employers to invest in trades education and training for employees.



HOUSING



Montana continues to experience a housing shortage that is severely limiting business growth, attraction and employee recruitment to the Flathead.

- Amending state law to streamline local permitting processes with DEQ to enable more efficient and innovative housing solutions to get to market more expediently.
- Prioritizing investment in sewer/water infrastructure, expanding investment in workforce development, and encouraging great public-private investment collaborations.

CHILD CARE

The Flathead Valley has identified the lack of affordable, quality, and accessible child care as a major impediment to growing business and employment. We support the efforts designed to eliminate unnecessary barriers to licensure and employment for child care providers.

- We support increasing the child care tax credit.
- We support ongoing regulatory reforms that increase capacity while maintaining safety and quality of care.
- We encourage the exploration of how the State could provide incentives for employer-supported child care benefits. For example, Kentucky's one third, one third match for employers of all sizes and budgets.



EDUCATION

Montana is ranked 50th in the nation for starting teacher pay. If we want to attract, retain, and grow innovative, family-wage businesses we must address school funding for the K-12 system and Flathead Valley Community College. Retaining and attracting top talent and fully-funded educational systems are paramount for future success.

- We support full, stable and predictable funding of our public education system that meets our communities' future workforce needs (K-12, 2-year, 4-year) and support regular assessment of the impact of the funding formula, including restrictions on the annual inflation-related adjustments.



HEALTHCARE

We believe that the United States has the most advanced healthcare in the world, in large part due to private sector led innovation and employer-sponsored healthcare coverage. Ensuring access to quality and affordable healthcare is critical for the health of Flathead County residents.



- Preserving Medicaid Access through the continuation of Medicaid Expansion to ensure a healthy workforce with accessible healthcare for all employees.
- We believe the best approach to ensuring our community is healthy and vibrant is to provide quality, affordable and accessible healthcare services from a wide range of providers. We need to continue to invest in existing infrastructure that will strengthen emergency response systems, the healthcare workforce, and fund the growing needs in behavioral and mental health, long-term care
- The approach should include strategies to reduce the rates of uninsured individuals; reduce excessive uncompensated care; provide greater investment in medical workforce development, particularly in behavioral and mental health; and support the deployment of wrap-around services to improve healthcare outcomes from birth to the end of life.

MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH/PUBLIC SAFETY

Montana's mental and behavioral health system is broken and contributing greatly to increasing costs associated with mental illness, drug addiction, and homelessness in the Flathead.

- We support the Behavioral Health System for Future Generations and urge the legislature to spur implementation and fully fund Phase 1 foundational recommendations.
- We support additional resources for state and local law enforcement and public safety personnel.



NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT



We recognize businesses, citizens, and government share the same environment. As Montana continues to grow, we must commit to improve our air and water quality, conserve limited natural resources, retain working landscapes, promote responsible use and development of lands while ensuring first class access to outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities persist.

- Voluntary private sector initiatives to promote efficiency, sustainability, and stewardship to conserve and enhance our spectacular natural environment on public and private lands should be encouraged.
- We support responsible active management of our working forest and agriculture lands to meet the demands of society for food and fiber while conserving the environmental and societal attributes of the landscape and supporting the economies of our communities.
- We support, through careful planning, development, and implementation of community protection plans that address wildfire and other natural disasters and threats.

ENERGY

Our communities depend on energy that is reliable, affordable, and secure. Energy resources that can satisfy the present and future demands of businesses and individuals are essential for our economic health and well-being.

- We support hydropower generation across our region and oppose all efforts to remove dams or negatively impact existing carbon-free, reliable hydropower generation projects.
- We oppose any government regulation that would impede energy generation development, innovation, efficiency, and reliability.



Montana Chamber of Commerce Priorities

Preserving Medicaid Access, Tax Reform, Housing, Child Care, Tort Reform, Energy,
Tax Increment Financing, Enabling Entrepreneurship
www.montanachamber.com

ENGAGE...PARTICIPATE...BE INFORMED

2025 Flathead Delegation

Senators:

- SD 3, Carl Glimm, Carl.Glimm@legmt.gov, 406-751-7334
- SD 2, Dave Fern, Dave.Fern@legmt.gov, 406-212-0674
- *SD 4, John Fuller, John.Fuller@legmt.gov, 406-253-4897
- *SD 5, Matt Regier, Matt.Regier@legmt.gov
- *SD 6, Mark Noland, Mark.Noland@legmt.gov, 406-253-8982

Representatives:

- HD 2, Tom Millett, Tom.Millett@legmt.gov, 406-212-3613
- HD 3, Debo Powers, Debo.Powers@legmt.gov, 406-407-0787
- HD 4, Lyn Bennett, Lyn.Bennett@legmt.gov, 406-890-4468
- HD 5, Braxton Mitchell, Braxton.Mitchell@legmt.gov
- *HD 6, Amy Regier, Amy.Regier@legmt.gov, 406-253-8421
- *HD 7, Courtenay Sprunger, Courtenay.Sprunger@legmt.gov, 406-407-1151
- *HD 8, Lukas Schubert, Lukas.Schubert@legmt.gov
- *HD 9, Steven Kelly, Steven.Kelly@legmt.gov, 406-752-8070
- *HD 10, Terry Falk, Terry.Falk@legmt.gov
- *HD 11, Ed Byrne, Ed.Byrne@legmt.gov, 406-871-6001
- HD 12, Tracy Sharp, Tracy.Sharp@legmt.gov, 406-407-2197

*Indicate Kalispell legislators

Phone numbers are provided by some legislators and are listed.

The Kalispell Chamber has your back. You are busy running your business so we do the work for you. We'd love you to join us in advocating for strong, responsible public policy that ensures a thriving business climate and community for Kalispell & the Flathead Valley.

Government Affairs

Committee: January - May

During the legislative session, we will meet every other Friday beginning on January 10th through May 2nd from 12:00pm - 1:00pm at the Chamber. We can also provide you with you a Zoom link. June through December, we will resume our normal first Mondays of the month.

Stay Current

Read your weekly eNews emails that come out the beginning of each week. Watch the Leadership Message Video. Visit kalispellchamber.com for announcements and current information.

Connect with your Legislative Officials

They truly do want to hear from you. Make your voice and opinion heard. Let them know when they've done well and if you'd like to see something different. We will occasionally send out Action Alerts urging you to reach on out specific bills and issues. Use your voice. Together we can be at the table and not on the menu.

To find your legislators, visit <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-information/>



LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

1. Bill is introduced in House or Senate - 1st Reading
2. Bill is assigned to a committee
3. Bill is heard in a committee and 1. passes with or without amendments 2. fails by vote, or 3. is denied a hearing
4. Bill returns to the floor for potential amendments & engrossments (2nd reading)
5. Bill passes out of chamber of origin (3rd reading)
6. Bill repeats in the second chamber
7. All steps must occur, or the bill dies
8. If bill moves forward without an amendment in the second chamber, bill goes to the Governor
9. If bill is amended in the second chamber, and is approved by the author and majority of the chamber of origin approve changes, bill goes to the governor
10. If the bill's author doesn't agree with the amendments, a conference committee is appointed
11. Conferees from both chambers negotiate changes to the bill. If unanimous agreement on a conference report, the report passes to the House and Senate Rules Committees, and if it receives a majority vote in both chambers, the bill goes to the Governor. If all steps are not successful, the bill dies.



LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR

- Monday, **January 6** - Session opens
Tuesday, **January 21** - Last day to request General Bills & Resolutions
Monday, **January 27** - Last day to request Revenue Bills
Tuesday, **February 18** - Last day for Committee to request General Bills & Resolutions
Saturday, **February 22** - Last day to introduce General Bills
Tuesday, **March 4** - Transmittal of General Bills to the other chamber, last day to request Appropriation Bills
Wednesday, **March 19** - Last day for committees to request Revenue Bills, Reference bills
Monday, **March 24** - Transmittal of Estimate Revenue bills, Last day to request Study Resolutions
Wednesday, **March 26** - Last day to introduce Appropriations Bills, Revenue Bills, & Bills proposing Referenda
Thursday - **April 3** - Transmittal of Appropriation Bills, Revenue Bills, & Bills proposing Referenda
Friday, **April 11** - Transmittal of amendments to General Bills
Tuesday, **April 15** - Last day to introduce Study Resolutions
Friday, **April 18** - Transmittal of amendments to Appropriations & Revenue Bills, Revenue estimating resolutions, & Bills proposing Referenda
Tuesday, **April 22** - Transmittal of amendments to Revenue Estimating Joint Resolution
Wednesday, **April 23** - Transmittal of Interim Study Resolutions and amendments to Appropriation and Revenue Bills
Wednesday, **April 30** - Legislature adjourns

VENTUREBOLDLY

For more information or questions on Government Affairs contact Lorraine Clarno,
l.clarno@kalispellchamber.com
406.758.2804

2025 90-day session!