

# ENVISION

# 2026

# HALFTIME

# REPORT

# 2016-2021





## 3 **INTRODUCTION**

## 4 **WORKFORCE READINESS**

## 6 **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

## 7 **INFRASTRUCTURE**

## 12 **BUSINESS CLIMATE**

## 15 **THE PATH FORWARD**

**“Envision 2026 is driving  
Montana forward!”**

TODD O'HAIR, MONTANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, PRESIDENT & CEO

**[www.MONTANACHAMBER.com](http://www.MONTANACHAMBER.com)**

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## CHAIR'S CIRCLE (\$20,000+ PER YEAR)



## PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE (\$10,000 PER YEAR)



## PARTNERS (\$5,000 PER YEAR)



## ADVOCATES (UNDER \$5,000 PER YEAR)

ALPS  
Billings Clinic  
Blackfoot  
Browning Kaleczyc Berry & Hoven  
Crowley Fleck PLLP  
Flokvard Family Foundation  
Hecla Montana  
Junkermier, Clark, Campanella, Stevens

PayneWest  
Morrison-Maierle, Inc.  
Montana Health Co-Op  
Naturener USA LLC  
Opportunity Bank  
Republic Services  
SRS Crisafulli

Taylor Luther Group, PLLC  
Towhaul  
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Two Bear Capital  
Vision Net  
West Paw  
Wood's Powr-Grip  
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## THANK YOU TO ALL OUR ORIGINAL INVESTORS

Arrow Solutions Group Inc.  
Ash Grove Cement Inc.  
Avista Corp.  
Benefis Health Systems  
Best Burger Enterprises  
Brown Ranches  
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Gianforte Family Foundation  
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Rowe and Reynolds Charitable Fund

Sletten Construction Co.  
Talen Energy  
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Underriner Motors  
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Weave Companies  
Westmoreland Coal





# INTRODUCTION

FOR NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS, THE MONTANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HAS WORKED TIRELESSLY TO MAKE THE TREASURE STATE A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE AND DO BUSINESS.

Recognizing the challenges Montana faces and looking to capitalize upon its strengths, in 2016, the Montana Chamber launched an ambitious, long-range strategic plan called **Envision 2026**.

## ENVISION 2026 HAS FOUR OBJECTIVES:

### WORKFORCE READINESS

- + Creating an appropriately educated and skilled workforce to meet the needs of a growing economy
- + Engaging with students and schools

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- + Inspiring future business leaders
- + Recruiting talent
- + Eliminating barriers to entry and success

### INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

- + Upgrading Montana's roads, bridges, water and waste treatment systems to promote economic growth across the entire state
- + Expanding access to broadband and high speed Internet to meet the needs of the evolving economy
- + Ensuring infrastructure meets the needs of today's economy and promotes economic diversity tomorrow

### BUSINESS CLIMATE

- + Lowering and simplifying taxes
- + Improving the legal climate
- + Untangling rules and regulations
- + Reforming workers' compensation

Focusing on these four pillars of a competitive and thriving economy, the Montana Chamber of Commerce and Montana Chamber Foundation



are working to create opportunities for growth and prosperity.

The Montana Chamber of Commerce is a member-driven organization, which means it is ultimately a community-driven organization committed to strengthening and improving the quality of life in this great place.

Thank you to all who have joined the Montana Chamber in advancing the important mission of Envision 2026!

As Envision 2026 approaches the halfway mark, it is appropriate to take stock of what the Montana Chamber has accomplished thus far.



# WORKFORCE READINESS

THE MONTANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RECOGNIZES THAT THE WORKFORCE CHALLENGES IN OUR STATE REQUIRE A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO ADDRESS COMPLICATED ISSUES IMPACTING WORKERS AND BUSINESSES.

Understanding and educating business leaders on all the various Workforce Readiness programs plays an important role in solving growth challenges in our state. We support the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, the Montana Department of Commerce, the Office of Public Instruction, and the Montana University System in communicating business needs to align with the appropriate workforce training solutions and programs.

Through our Envision 2026 plan, we support businesses through legislative priorities and programs that make it easier to recruit, train and keep valuable employees. This includes the entire workforce, from engaging with kindergarten students to re-skilling adults.

## EXAMPLES OF OUR ONGOING EFFORTS INCLUDE:

**Helping businesses pay for additional education** increases skills and job readiness in targeted, high-demand industries by establishing qualified work-based learning programs for more job shadowing, apprenticeships, and paths to employment. We are encouraging businesses to offer on-the-job training through apprenticeships.

**Supporting students to earn high school graduating credits through employment** and expanding dual enrollment opportunities to allow more high school students to earn college credit. Our key growth area is in the career and technical education (CTE) courses that should not be strictly limited to in-class study. Work-based learning for middle and high school students must meet curriculum requirements while better preparing students for the workplace.





## MONTANA WORKFORCE SURVEY

The Montana Chamber of Commerce believes the first step in addressing Workforce Readiness is understanding the top concerns of business owners and their experience building and maintaining effective workforces.

In late 2019, the Montana Chamber launched an in-depth survey of employers and business leaders to better understand the appropriate focus for our efforts.

### THE FINDINGS:

**The biggest impediment to adding jobs is a lack of available skilled workers.**

- + **36%** of businesses have turned down growth opportunities due to workforce challenges.
- + **85%** of respondents reported attempting to grow their Montana workforce in 2020.
- + **64%** of Montana businesses are having difficulty filling entry- and mid-level positions.
- + **69%** of respondents think that Montana's schools are not adequately preparing students for the workforce.

### THE SOLUTIONS:

**Montana's schools need to focus more on preparing students to enter and succeed in the workforce.**

- + **80%** of Montana businesses believe that school districts should incorporate workforce readiness skills in their curricula.
- + **77%** believe that career advising in middle and high school needs to be strengthened.
- + **73%** say that business and economics education should be required in middle and high schools.

The Montana Chamber's workforce survey contains valuable data that Montana's policymakers and education officials at the state and local levels need to understand. The data collected in the 2019 WRF survey has the potential to drive fundamental change in Montana's middle and high schools.



[2019 WRF survey infographic](#)



# ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS A PILLAR OF  
A HEALTHY BUSINESS CLIMATE, WHICH IS WHY  
IT IS PART OF ENVISION 2026.

Montana consistently leads the nation in Entrepreneurship. We take on challenges in the fields, the shop floors, and the boardrooms. Innovating and solving challenges are a part of our lives.

While legislation can clear obstacles for entrepreneurs and help cultivate a climate of entrepreneurship, the Montana Chamber of Commerce and the Montana Chamber Foundation believe that programmatic efforts aimed at Montana's youth will pay the biggest dividends in the long term.

Through Envision 2026, we have engaged with youth on a scale unprecedented in Montana's history by connecting the business and education communities to focus on developing the critical skills our students need to succeed in the 21st Century / Information Age.



## YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

The Montana Chamber has partnered with Youth Entrepreneurs, a national organization that has reached thousands of students with entrepreneurial skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, self-reliance, and business economics.

Focusing on Montana students in grades six through 12, Youth Entrepreneurs cultivates the fundamental values, principles, and skills for empowering the next generation.

Through Envision 2026 funding, the Youth Entrepreneurs program has grown from six teachers in 2017 to 53 educators in 41 schools

in 36 communities across Montana. This is a long-term investment in the future of Montana's business climate.



## 'THE PROSPECTS' HIGH SCHOOL BUSINESS PLAN AND PITCH COMPETITION

In November 2020, the Montana Chamber launched a virtual statewide entrepreneurship competition with cash, technology prizes, and scholarships for high school students and their ideas, innovations, and existing small businesses.

**In our first year (2021), the contest received 93 entries from 171 students competing for scholarships and cash prizes.**

With categories like Best New Business Idea, Best Existing Business, Most Promise, Covid-19 Inspired Business, students from rural and urban Montana connect with industry experts through the Montana Chamber Foundation for mentoring, internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities. The Prospects received overwhelming support from the business community, with more than 70 Montana leaders stepping up to volunteer their time to review and judge student submissions.

The contest celebrates and rewards promising high school students by providing them with mentorship, training, and access to business leaders. Through this competition, the Montana Chamber Foundation promotes a positive self-image as innovative problem-solvers and entrepreneurs to motivate high school students to realize their full potential.





**MONTANA CHAMBER REPORT:  
THE STATE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN  
MONTANA 2018 BY BBER**

In 2018 the Montana Chamber engaged with the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research to study the issue.

This study found that more than **10 percent of Montanans owned a business** as their primary job, compared to 6 percent of Americans nationally. Around **3,400 Montanans start a new business each month**, and more than half of the startups formed are still open for business five years later. This implies a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem.



*Key findings from [The State of Entrepreneurship in Montana](#).*



*More commentary on this study can be found at MTPR [here](#).*

**MONTANA ENTREPRENEURIAL  
ECOSYSTEM STUDY:  
MISSOULA AND BOZEMAN HAVE SOME  
OF THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE U.S.**

Conversations about entrepreneurship often focus on Silicon Valley, Boston, or other major metropolitan areas. Yet, according to a report funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Missoula and Bozeman, Montana enjoy some of the highest levels of entrepreneurship in the nation in terms of startup and high-growth companies.

A study done by the **Montana High Tech Business Alliance** found that Montana's high level of entrepreneurship is leveraged by dense networks of active local support organizations, non-profits, university-related organizations, government, and successful entrepreneurs who serve as mentors to a younger cohort of entrepreneurs.



*The full report is available [here](#).*



# INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

ROADS, BRIDGES, CLEAN WATER, WASTEWATER TREATMENT, AND OTHER PUBLIC WORKS ARE THE BEDROCK OF A THRIVING ECONOMY.



A growing economy needs reliable infrastructure to connect supply chains and efficiently move goods and services across communities and borders. Infrastructure also connects households to higher quality opportunities for employment, healthcare, and education.

The Montana Chamber and its partners have worked tirelessly over the years, encouraging lawmakers to invest in Montana's future by ensuring the infrastructure serving businesses and communities today is maintained and expanded. Historically low-interest rates in recent years have offered unique opportunities to invest in Montana's future.

## **BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS: THE MONTANA INFRASTRUCTURE COALITION**

Montana's political landscape over the last decade has made infrastructure investment a continual uphill battle. Using Envision 2026 dollars as seed capital, the Montana Chamber formed the Montana Infrastructure Coalition in 2015 after state government repeatedly failed to approve bonding legislation for capital projects. This Coalition of private companies, trade associations, and governments throughout Montana has led the charge to invest in projects that communities need for a healthy economy. The Montana Chamber and others built the Montana Infrastructure Coalition to get results, which is exactly what it has done.



*Learn more about the Montana Infrastructure Coalition at <http://mtinfrastructure.org/>.*



## ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES OR DEFINING “CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE”



- + Recreational Trails
- + Parks, Transit
- + Senior Living
- + Schools, Libraries, City Hall
- + Broadband, Airports, Rail Facilities
- + Dams, Irrigation, Inland Waterways
- + Police, Fire, Detention Facilities, Medical Care
- + Power, Communication, Solid Waste
- + Clean Water, Sewer, Roads, Bridges

Source: MT Infrastructure Coalition

### HOW WE DEFINE INFRASTRUCTURE

The Montana Chamber and Montana Infrastructure Coalition take an all-of-the-above approach to define infrastructure. In the first five plus years of the Coalition's existence, the focus has been on determining which types of projects to prioritize. The graphic above visualizes the Coalition's interpretation of this.

Project prioritization and the Coalition's advocacy sometimes shift based on funding availability and when opportunities emerge to address specific infrastructure types.

### SHAPING THE INFRASTRUCTURE DEBATE WITH RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Envision 2026 has allowed the Montana Chamber to invest in research to help build the case for many of its subsequent legislative victories.

Key Envision 2026-commissioned studies on Montana infrastructure issues include:

- + The Economic Impact of the Early Retirement of Colstrip Units 3 and 4 ([June 2018](#))  
*Purpose: measure jobs, wages, and tax collections of a major infrastructure asset in Montana.*

- + The Case for Carbon Capture, Utilization & Sequestration ([March 2018](#))  
*Purpose: explore an environmentally friendly strategy to prolong the life of existing major infrastructure assets in Montana.*
- + Funding of the Montana Transportation System ([December 2016](#))  
*Purpose: educate decision-makers about existing transportation funding in Montana.*
- + Capping the Coal Severance Tax Trust Fund - Impact and Alternative ([November 2016](#))  
*Purpose: identify a potential ongoing funding source for core infrastructure assets in Montana.*
- + Overview of Critical Local Government Infrastructure Needs (November 2016)  
*Purpose: demonstrate the need for infrastructure funding reform during the 2017 Legislature.*
- + Impact of Restoring Coal Severance Tax Flow to Treasure State Endowment Trust ([November 2016](#))  
*Purpose: explore alternative infrastructure funding policy.*
- + Montana's Local Option Resort Tax ([November 2016](#))  
*Purpose: educate decision-makers on the existing policy as they consider general local option tax proposals.*





## SNAPSHOT OF RECENT LEGISLATIVE WINS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

### 2021 LEGISLATURE

- + \$141 million for capital infrastructure projects across Montana (HB 14)
- + \$19 million from the Treasure State Endowment Program for water, wastewater and bridge projects (HB 11)
- + Creation of the ConnectMT Act to allocate federal COVID-19 relief money for broadband deployment in underserved areas of Montana (SB 297)



*Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2021 Voting Review.*

### 2019 LEGISLATURE

- + \$80 million for capital infrastructure projects across Montana (HB 652)
- + New legislative framework to determine bonding capacity for infrastructure in future sessions (HB 553)
- + \$23.5 million from the Treasure State Endowment Program for water, wastewater, and bridge projects (HB 11)



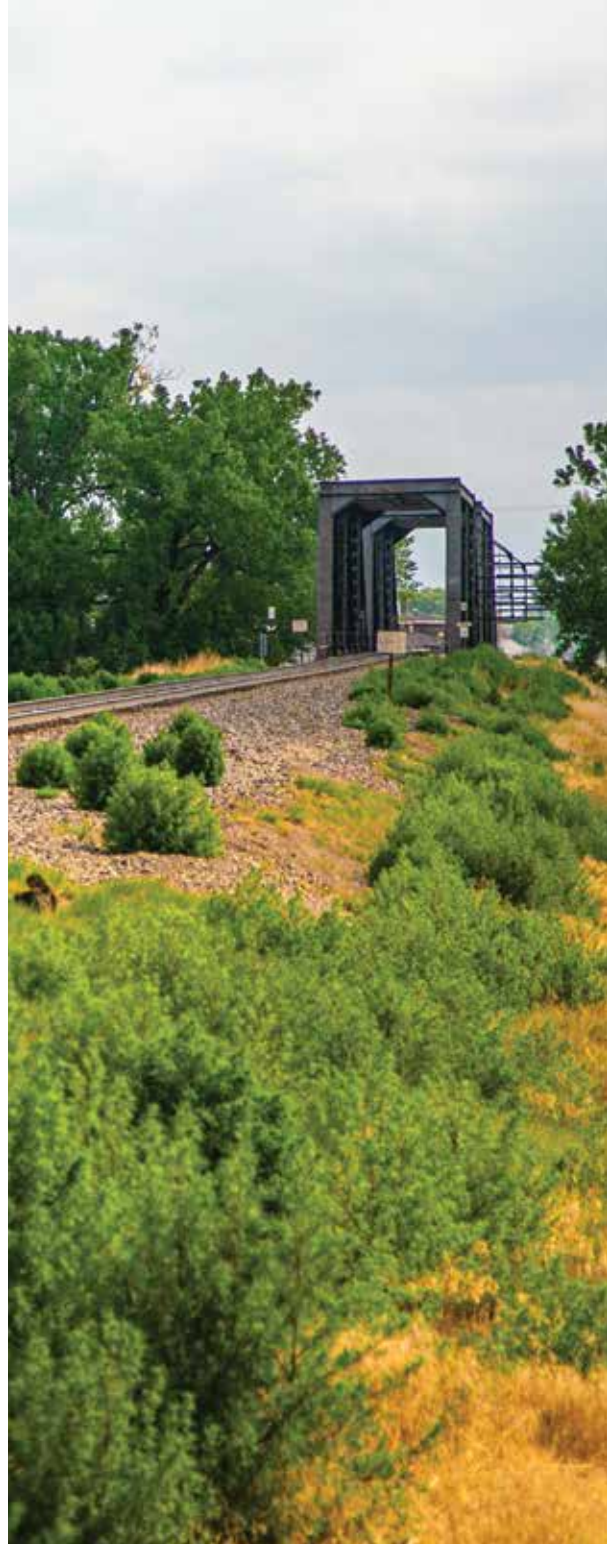
*Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2019 Voting Review.*

### 2017 LEGISLATURE

- + 6-cent increase in Montana's fuel tax to fund road and bridge projects (HB 473)
- + \$16 million from the Treasure State Endowment Program for water, wastewater and bridge projects (HB 11)



*Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2017 Voting Review.*







## KEY VICTORY IN DEPTH: FUEL TAX DELIVERS ON INVESTMENT

The 2017 Bridge and Road Safety and Accountability Act (HB 473) has brought nearly \$60 million to Montana's cities and counties for critical-need infrastructure projects.

The political lift required to achieve this policy cannot be overstated in a legislative session that featured a divided government. In HB 473, the gas tax increases by six cents over six years, and the

diesel tax increases by 1.5 cents.

To generate this revenue, the bill increased fuel taxes for the first time in 25 years. The legislation leveraged Montana's available share of federal matching dollars and secured additional federal funding beyond that. In short, this legislation brings tens of millions of dollars into Montana infrastructure that would not otherwise be here.<sup>1</sup>

	New Fuel Tax Dollars to Counties	New Fuel Tax Dollars to Cities	Total Allocations
2018	\$2,346,461.76	\$3,854,954.63	\$6,201,416.39
2019	\$5,000,530.85	\$8,215,271.12	\$13,215,801.97
2020	\$7,201,985.93	\$11,831,997.18	\$19,033,983.11
2021	\$7,239,840.45	\$11,894,187.60	\$19,134,028.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$21,788,818.99</b>	<b>\$35,796,410.53</b>	<b>\$57,585,229.52</b>

	Montana Gas Tax Rate (per gallon)	Montana Diesel Tax Rate (per gallon)
7/1/1994	\$0.27	\$0.2775
7/1/2017	\$0.315	\$0.2925
7/1/2019	\$0.32	\$0.2945
7/1/2021	\$0.325	\$0.2955
7/1/2022	\$0.33	\$0.2975

Projects Funded by 2017 Fuel Tax Increase as of February 23, 2021*	
Completed	355
Funds Distributed	286
Funds Awarded	100

<sup>1</sup>Details about the distribution of fuel tax funds are available at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/roadbridge/>.

\*Source: <https://app.mdt.mt.gov/barsaa/agency/project/list>



# BUSINESS CLIMATE

LIMITED REGULATION, A COMPETITIVE TAX STRUCTURE, AND A PREDICTABLE LEGAL CLIMATE ARE HALLMARKS OF A STRONG BUSINESS CLIMATE.



Improving Montana's business climate has been the Montana Chamber's core mission since its founding. This work requires diving into the minutia of policy details, fixing what is broken, and promoting what works well.

## **MONTANA CHAMBER RESEARCH DRIVES DIALOGUE FOR REFORM**

To make the appropriate case for significant policy change, The Montana Chamber commissioned additional research about Montana's business climate with the help of

Envision 2026. These projects have included:

- + A scientific poll of Montana voters about our state's tax structure (📅 **February 2020**)  
*Purpose: identify effective tax reform messaging with the voting public.*
- + Study of Montana's Tax Structure with Suggestions for Reform (📅 **December 2018**)  
*Purpose: identify structural and incremental reform options for our tax structure as starting points for the Montana Chamber's long-term tax reform advocacy strategy.*



## SNAPSHOT OF RECENT LEGISLATIVE WINS FOR BUSINESS CLIMATE

### 2021 LEGISLATURE

- + Revise the Wrongful Discharge Act, giving employers more time to evaluate employee fit and performance (HB 254)
- + Establish COVID-19 business liability protections (SB 65)
- + Revise civil liability laws relating to damages, reducing unnecessary legal costs on businesses (SB 251)
- + Limit property owner liability to individuals who harm themselves while trespassing (SB 338)
- + Increase the Business Equipment Tax exemption from \$100,000 to \$300,000 (HB 303)
- + Simplify the code and reduce individual income taxes (SB 399 and SB 159)



***Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2021 Voting Review.***

### 2019 LEGISLATURE

- + Allow pre-approval of tax abatement for new and expanding industry (SB 318)
- + Reauthorized Medicaid expansion with program improvements (HB 658)
- + Additional flexibility for a commercial property owner to cancel delinquent taxes accrued by prior owner (HB 386)

- + Continue the charitable endowment tax credit (SB 111), which has saved Montana individuals and businesses nearly seven million dollars since 2010<sup>2</sup>



***Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2019 Voting Review.***

### 2017 LEGISLATURE

- + Revise the judgment interest rate in civil and tort liability cases (SB 293)
- + Reduce penalty and interest assessments levied on business taxpayers (SB 317)
- + Tax exemption for installing pollution control equipment (SB 132), saving Montana businesses nearly \$23 million since its passage<sup>3</sup>
- + Increased tax abatement for new and expanding industry (HB 226), saving Montana businesses more than \$4 million since its passage<sup>4</sup>
- + More favorable corporate loss carryback and carryforward provisions (HB 550)
- + Individual income taxpayers are allowed to deduct business expenses from their adjusted gross income when the expenses cannot be deducted federally (HB 574)



***Learn more about these and additional victories in the Montana Chamber's 2017 Voting Review.***

## THE LEADING VOICE AGAINST ANTI-BUSINESS BILLS

Since going public with Envision 2026, the Montana Chamber has successfully opposed more than 100 bad bills for business, from tax increases to unreasonable regulations. This work has saved Montana businesses millions of dollars, let alone time and compliance costs.

Preventing anti-business legislation is just as important as advancing good bills. The Montana Chamber is often the leading or sole voice for business against bad policy that, if passed, would have discouraged investment and job creation in our state.

<sup>2</sup> Montana Department of Revenue biennial reports for 2018-20 and 2016-18, available at <https://mtrevenue.gov/publications/biennial-reports/>.

<sup>3</sup> Estimation from the Montana Department of Revenue, February 23, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



## ENVISION 2026 ACCELERATES SAVINGS AND INVESTMENTS FOR MONTANA BUSINESSES

While it is challenging to fully quantify how policy impacts a business' bottom line, the Montana Chamber has demonstrated its ability to consistently deliver savings for the business community. Envision 2026 has continued this momentum and has expanded the Montana Chamber's bandwidth to secure cost savings (and stop cost increases) with greater efficiency

and frequency. Smart public investments in infrastructure and in the next generation of workers is also realized thanks to Envision 2026.

The return on investment is clear when the Montana Chamber plays "sword and shield" for businesses, in both the legislature and in the courts.

### More Than 20 Years of Delivering Savings for Montana Businesses\*

25% drop in workers' compensation premiums since 2011 reform	\$130 million saved/year
Intervening in Satterlee workers' compensation case	\$25 million saved/year
Business equipment tax reductions (1999-2021)	\$149 million saved/year
Defeating various tax increases (2005-2021)	\$379 million saved/year
Income tax decreases (2003-2021)	\$75 million saved/year
Tort reforms (1999-2021)	\$12 million saved/year
Paid family, sick leave mandates defeated (2007-2009, 2021)	\$93 million saved/year
New health insurance mandates defeated (2005-2009)	\$2 million saved/year
Employment revisions to medical marijuana law (2011)	\$40,000/lawsuit avoided
"Hostile work environment" lawsuit bill defeated (2007-2011)	\$40,000/lawsuit avoided
Strengthening exclusive remedy law in court (2013)	\$100,000/lawsuit avoided
<b>TOTAL ESTIMATED SAVINGS FOR MONTANA BUSINESSES</b>	<b>\$865 million saved/year</b>

### ESTIMATED RETURN PER EMPLOYEE PER YEAR

**\$1,806 per employee/year**

### Securing Investments for Montana's Business Community

Recurring investments in statewide infrastructure assets	\$142 million/year
One-time investments in statewide infrastructure assets	\$264 million
Recurring investments in career readiness education	\$5 million/year
Recurring investments in Montana economic development programs	\$3.4 million/year

\*1999-2021. Figures on estimates based on state fiscal notes, news articles, labor reports, financial statistics, court documents and the legislative record. Figures have not been adjusted for inflation.





# THE PATH FORWARD

ENVISION 2026 IS AN INVESTMENT IN MONTANA'S FUTURE. IT IS BOTH A SHORT AND LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR THE MONTANA CHAMBER TO DRIVE PUBLIC POLICY THAT PROMOTES BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND FOSTERS A CULTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND JOB CREATION.

The Montana Chamber can measure its success with better laws, friendlier rules and regulations, and new programs that are laying the groundwork for Montana's future success.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Covid-19 accelerated workforce challenges in Montana, and the issue is more urgent now than ever. A number of issues contribute to workforce shortages, including access to childcare, aging demographics, affordable housing, and an employability skills gap, to name a few.

We are leveraging the Montana Chamber's relationships and convening authority to build coalitions that address the complex workforce development challenge facing Montana businesses.

The Montana Chamber will spend the next five years aligning educational outputs with employers' 21st Century needs at both the K-12 system and higher education.

By convening business leaders and education leaders at the state and local levels, we can better understand the unique challenges in our education system and learn how the business environment is changing today.

In K-12, we are working with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and local school districts to increase career awareness opportunities and improve work-based learning programs that are easier for employers and students to utilize.

We are breaking down barriers and increasing the number of meaningful opportunities for both businesses and their future workforce, and creating an environment for growth.

Additionally, we are promoting and supporting Career and Technical Education (CTE) to increase career pathway awareness and improve basic employability skills at a younger age. The Montana Chamber recognizes that student employment is important in developing these skills.

We are promoting activities that celebrate graduates that choose all career pathways—not just those that require a four-year education.

At the higher education level, the Montana Chamber is working with individual colleges and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education to incorporate employability skills education and basic business economics into all curricula. We will increase focus on teamwork skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, personal responsibility, and building realistic expectations of the workplace.

Additionally, the Montana Chamber is regularly convening business and education leaders to pursue improved and diverse education delivery.

The Montana Chamber has identified high-wage, high-demand growth sectors, and we are seeking creative educational opportunities that give students diverse pathways to achieve successful



careers. These opportunities and experiences allow students more targeted education and promote the skills that can be achieved in shorter bites, such as micro-credentialling, stackable credits, work-based learning, and remote learning.

The Montana Chamber is working with many partners to identify successful programs in-state and out of state and scale those programs in Montana.

### ENVISION FUNDING

To fully achieve these targeted efforts, the Montana Chamber will need to add 1-2 full-time employees that can focus on K-12 and higher education efforts. These individuals will work with local school districts, higher education officials, and business leaders to advocate and build the necessary programs. Additional lobbying and government affairs efforts may also be required to make necessary changes to current law and directly target taxpayer funds to appropriate programs.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Montana continually ranks as one of the most entrepreneurial states in the country—maintaining that status will not happen by accident.

Entrepreneurship is key to ensuring that every community in Montana reaches its full potential, whether that's in rural, remote areas of our state or in our growing metropolitan areas. Technology and entrepreneurship break the geographic disadvantage that has historically beset some Montana communities, opening every community to global possibilities with the right idea, business plan, and entrepreneurial thinking.

Business leaders recognize the value of promoting entrepreneurial thinking because it promotes business creation and reinforces the basic employability skills lacking in the workforce today. Critical thinking, understanding economic and entrepreneurial principles, problem-solving, leadership, working in a team setting, and taking personal responsibility are foundational to successful careers.



### ENVISION INVESTMENT

Since bringing Youth Entrepreneurs to Montana in 2017, the program has expanded to more than 40 schools and more than 50 teachers across the state in 2021.

To bring Youth Entrepreneurs to all high schools in Montana over the next five years, the Montana Chamber will need to add 1-2 full-time employees, working with local school districts and business leaders to encourage and support the adoption of the program in every school. Focusing first on Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes in 9th-12th grades, Youth Entrepreneurs can grow to include other classes and expand into 6th-8th grades. Reaching our students at a younger age with entrepreneurial thinking and career awareness is a goal supported by the entire business community.

The Montana Chamber can grow this program throughout the state by increasing participation in our statewide business pitch competition, The Prospects. This competition provides cash, technology, and educational awards. It allows business leaders acting as judges to identify students expressing interest in their respective business sectors for increased career awareness and career pathways aligned with their interests.

The Prospects competition can also provide basic real-life education, such as tax responsibility, business plan development, return on investment, and other life skills necessary



for a successful career as an entrepreneur or employee of a business.

Additional investment is necessary to support cash prizes for the Prospects competition, outreach to businesses, trade associations, and education leaders through luncheons, Youth Entrepreneur teacher and business leader conferences, and other convening opportunities.

## BUSINESS CLIMATE

Reforming Montana's tax system is an audacious goal that requires patience and consistent attention. Regulatory and legal reforms can be achieved consistently through legislative sessions and through collaboration with Administration officials.

Achieving these goals will require research, expert analysis, polling, and increased government affairs activity to build statewide support for meaningful tax reform. Elected officials need public support to enact meaningful change, and the Montana Chamber can lead the conversation with trusted research and data combined with message-tested polling to stimulate discussion rather than shut it down. Events, business leader roundtables, and appropriate media investment can build public support for legislative action led by the Montana Chamber's Government Affairs team.

## ENVISION INVESTMENT

Regulatory and legal reforms require research, legal analysis, and in many cases, legislative action. Identifying model reforms from other states and building expert coalitions to focus on issues with broad business sector implications create the most efficient pathways for legislative success and administrative action.

The Montana Chamber needs to add 1-2 full-time employees dedicated to lobbying, research, public outreach, and legal analysis to accomplish these goals.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Building and maintaining infrastructure that supports business development into the future

requires continual planning and targeted investment in the rapidly evolving economy. A clear vision of the future Montana economy is necessary to assure limited resources are invested in supporting high growth potential.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way governments and citizens view infrastructure investment.

To ensure government leaders are in step with the evolving business climate, the Montana Chamber needs to lead discussions in local communities and state agencies, educating leaders on changing business practices, emerging trends, and impacts on infrastructure considerations.

Understanding future pressures on traditional infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and airports require additional attention. Issues related to water supply, management, and treatment are quickly emerging as top issues across the western United States and increasingly will affect Montana's economic growth.

## ENVISION INVESTMENT

To bring appropriate attention to infrastructure investment and emerging issues, the Montana Chamber needs to maintain its influence as a founding member of the Montana Infrastructure Coalition as a partner. Additional resources are needed to raise public awareness, conduct business leader roundtables, and research emerging trends related to infrastructure and best practices.



# ENVISION**2026** **HALFTIME REPORT**

ENVISION 2026 IS AN INVESTMENT  
IN MONTANA'S FUTURE.

IT IS BOTH A SHORT AND  
LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR THE  
MONTANA CHAMBER TO DRIVE  
PUBLIC POLICY THAT PROMOTES  
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND  
FOSTERS A CULTURE  
OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND  
JOB CREATION.