

Other Items



FROM THE DESK OF . . .

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TO: Mayor and City Council
Tina Volek, City Administrator

SUBJECT: 2015 Legislature

At the November 17 City Council work session, Councilmember Yakawich suggested that a legislative success strategy might be helpful for the Council and staff. The Mayor also suggested that material on the Legislature's internet home page might help everyone understand the legislative process. Attached are documents that respond to those suggestions.

The "2015 Montana Legislature – City of Billings legislative success strategy" outlines the City's legislative priorities and recommends a number activities that Councilmembers and staff can perform to help promote those priorities. The Council may wish to review the proposal and use it as an informal guide or may choose to officially adopt it at a future City Council meeting.

The remaining material comes from the Montana Legislature's website. The last two documents may be especially helpful. The document titled "Contacting Legislators" offers several means of communicating with Legislators. Many Legislators also have personal email accounts. Please contact Ed Bartlett or me if you want a Legislator's email address. The document titled "Finding and Tracking Bills" shows the kind of bill information that is available through a State system called LAWS. The internet address to access that page is [http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w\\$.startup?P_SESS=20151](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w$.startup?P_SESS=20151).

2015 Montana Legislature – City of Billings legislative success strategy

The Billings City Council has adopted five (5) legislative priorities or strategies. They are as follows:

Finance & Taxation

The City of Billings will support bills which provide financial support to local governments and oppose Legislative attempts to decrease shared revenues or transfer costs to local governments.

Local Government Powers

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

Public Health, Safety & City Employee Relations

The City of Billings values its employees and supports legislation that improves worker safety and protects the public.

Land Use, Property & Environmental Regulation

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

Regional & Community Coalitions & Partnerships

The City of Billings supports legislation that enhances the ability of local governments to address concerns that are shared among private and public partners, either locally or statewide.

The City Council will pursue these priorities/strategies through the following actions:

1. The City Council will commit adequate financial resources and personnel to provide information and position statements to Legislators before and throughout the session as well as during the interim study period between sessions.
2. The City will contract for services with an effective legislative lobbyist and provide him/her with sufficient support and resources to promote the City's priorities among Legislators and to accomplish the desired outcomes.
3. The Lobbyist will attend 2015 Legislature committee meetings/hearings and will testify and promote the City's priorities as needed. S/he will also attend the appropriate legislative interim committee meetings.
4. The lobbyist and City staff will regularly communicate with City Council on the status of local government legislation and strategic plan successes. Such communication shall be no less frequent than bi-weekly during the Legislative session.
5. City staff will coordinate and activate a City Council phone tree to distribute information among Council members and with constituents when requested by the lobbyist or City staff.

6. The lobbyist or City staff will prepare information sheets or talking points for Council members who are asked to contact legislators on the City's behalf.

7. With adequate notice, individual Council members and senior City staff members will be available to travel to Helena for lobbying activities which may include personal contact with area legislators and testimony before Legislative committees.

8. The lobbyist and City administrative personnel will coordinate and communicate on a regular basis to assist and support lobbying efforts, to promote the City's priorities, to monitor legislative activities, and to comply with Commissioner on Political Practices rules for legislative lobbying.

9. City Council members, City staff and the City lobbyist will monitor legislative activities among its local partners (SD 2, County, BSEDA, Chamber, MSU-B, etc) and will actively support their legislation when it coincides with City priorities.

10. At the conclusion of the 2015 Legislative Session, City staff and lobbyist will debrief and provide a final report to City Council that details the successes, failures and proposed future actions that will continue to advance the City's priorities.

DRAFT



From Idea to Bill

The problems that face Montana citizens change and grow. Montana law must change and grow to meet the challenges of the future. Every session, the Legislature considers passing new laws or changing existing ones to meet those challenges.

Only legislators may introduce bills. But where do legislators get the ideas for the bills they propose? They come from many different sources:

Individual legislators. Members of the Montana Legislature have a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. They may be parents, students, teachers, lawyers, farmers, doctors, or businesspersons. Each member's expertise and personal experiences influences the kinds of bills he or she proposes.

Constituents. Often, concerned citizens or groups will alert legislators to problems and ask them to sponsor legislation to address those problems. Stories in the media may also bring problems to legislators' attention.

Government agencies. The executive agencies that administer state programs and services may see a problem that might be solved through legislation. Employees of these agencies may approach legislators and ask them to sponsor bills to address the problems.

Interim committees. These legislative committees meet between sessions to study certain topics in depth. They may decide to introduce legislation as a result of their studies.

Interest groups. Interest groups may represent single issues, trades, professions, or social groups. Some examples are groups that represent labor, business, teachers, farmers, low-income people, and veterans. Because interest groups usually have greater resources than individuals, they can be very effective in urging legislators to propose bills.

Court decisions. If a court finds a problem with a law or finds a law to be unconstitutional, legislators may decide to try to fix the problem with new legislation.

Other states. If there is no clear solution to a problem, legislators may ask their staff to research how other states have addressed similar issues.

Once a legislator has an idea for a bill, he or she asks the legislative staff to draft it. The bill drafter makes sure the bill is written in the proper legal form. The drafter also works with the legislator to make sure the bill will accomplish what the legislator intends.

Once the bill is drafted, one or more legislators may sign the bill as sponsors. The main sponsor is responsible for seeing that the bill makes its way through the legislative process.

Legislators must introduce their bills by filing them either with the chief clerk of the House or the secretary of the Senate. Senators must introduce their bills in the

Senate. Representatives must introduce their bills in the House. Only House members may sponsor bills that appropriate money.

The secretary or clerk assigns a number to each bill. The number reflects where the bill originates. For example, a Senate bill might be called SB 1 and a House bill HB 1. This is how the bill is identified throughout the legislative process, even after it's transmitted to the second chamber.

The legislative process is cumbersome and complex. But the nation's founders intended it to be that way. They wanted every bill to get careful scrutiny. They wanted anyone affected by a bill to have a voice in the debate.

The system of government they designed helps to ensure that only the best ideas survive and become law.

From Bill to Law



From Bill to Law

From Bill to Law Diagram [HTML](#) [PDF](#)

Legislators gather in the House and Senate chambers during floor sessions to debate and vote on bills. But first, they hold committee meetings where they can listen to the concerns and recommendations of the public, lobbyists, and other legislators.

Committees

Each legislator usually serves on at least one committee. In the House, the speaker appoints committee members. In the Senate, a Committee on Committees appoints them.

Every bill that the House and Senate considers is first assigned to a committee based on its subject matter. The chair of the committee, who is a member of the majority party, schedules a public hearing on the bill. These hearings are the most effective way for citizens to express their opinions about bills.

At the hearing, the public is invited to testify for or against the bill. Based on that testimony, committee members vote to recommend that the House or Senate pass the bill, kill the bill, or amend the bill. The committee may also table the bill, which means the committee has no recommendation. Tabling a bill often kills it.

Committees that meet during legislative sessions are called standing committees. Sometimes joint committees or joint subcommittees are formed with members from both chambers.

If the House and Senate cannot agree on amendments to a bill, they may appoint a special conference committee to try to find a compromise that both chambers can accept.

Floor Sessions

Every bill that passes the Legislature comes before each chamber at least three times.

Once a bill has been assigned a number, it's read to the chamber during what is called first reading. The presiding officer assigns the bill to a committee.

If a committee recommends passage of a bill, the bill is placed on second reading. At this time, the entire chamber, called into a Committee of the Whole, debates the bill during a floor session. Legislators may offer amendments. If the House or Senate votes to pass the bill during second reading, the bill (with any amendments) is placed on third reading.

The vote on third reading is the most important vote. It decides whether the bill passes the House or Senate. Legislators may not amend or debate a bill on third reading.

Once a bill passes through one chamber, it is transmitted to the other chamber. It goes through the same process there. If the second chamber amends the bill, it is sent back to the first chamber for approval of the amendments.

Each bill must pass both chambers in the same form before it is sent to the governor for his or her signature. If the two chambers cannot agree on amendments, they may appoint a conference committee to try to find a compromise.

The Governor's Role

Once a bill passes both chambers in the same form, it is sent to the governor. The governor has four options: sign the bill into law, recommend amendments to the bill, veto the bill, or take no action. If the governor takes no action, the bill becomes law after 10 days.

The governor may return a bill to the Legislature with suggested amendments. If the Legislature rejects the governor's suggestions, the governor may not return a bill with further amendments.

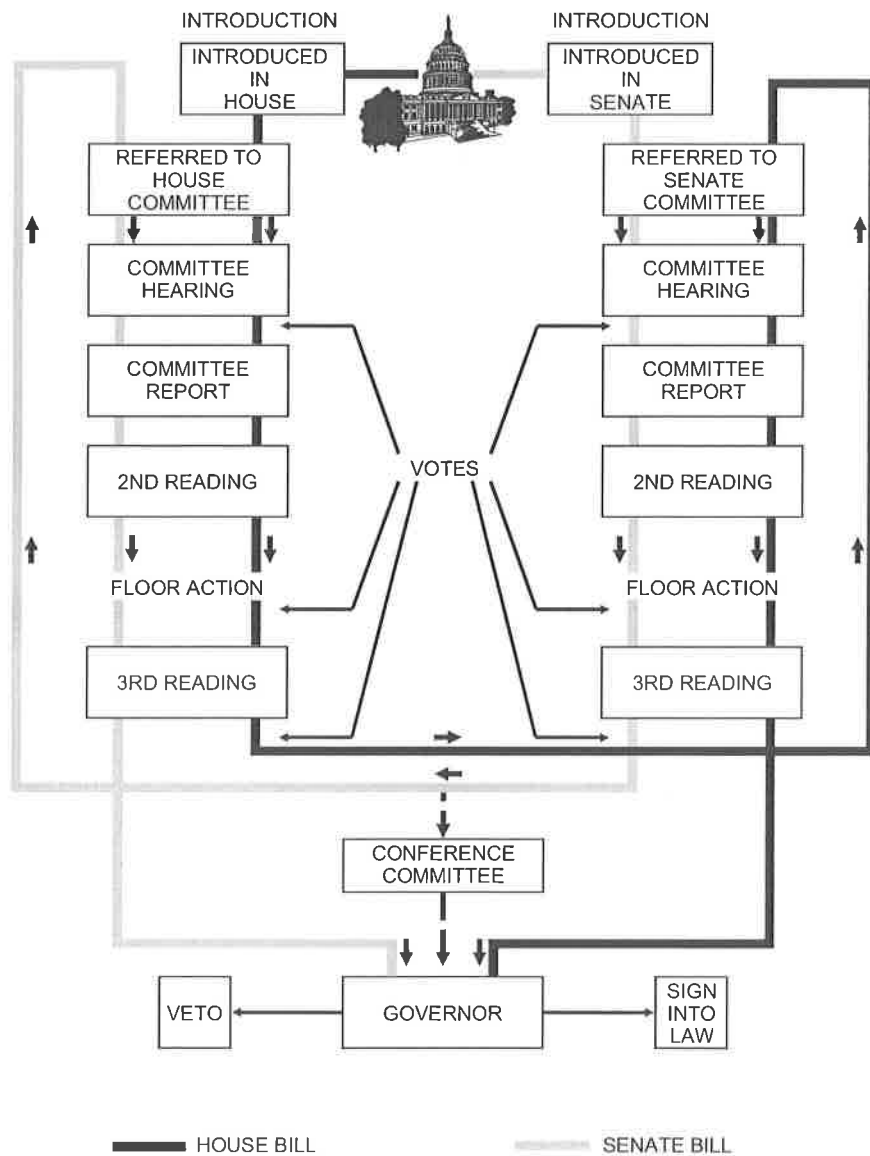
The Legislature may override a governor's veto if two-thirds of the members of each chamber vote in favor of doing so.

After a bill is signed by the governor or passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto, it is incorporated into the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). This is a compilation of all state laws. It is updated after each legislative session.

There are other publications that provide more information about the laws passed during a session. These include the *Laws of Montana* (session laws) and the *History and Final Status of Bills and Resolutions*.

Copies of legislative publications are available in libraries throughout the state and on [this website](#).

DIAGRAM OF HOW A BILL PROGRESSES THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS





Testifying Before a Committee

The U.S. and state constitutions give every citizen the right to speak on public issues and to be heard by officials at every level of government. At the Montana Legislature, that means you have the right to share your thoughts and opinions about any public issue under consideration by lawmakers.



The state Legislature functions in an open and public atmosphere. Committee meetings and floor sessions are open to the public. All votes must be taken in public and recorded for public access.

One of the most important opportunities to become involved in the debate over a bill is when it is the subject of a hearing before a legislative committee. You can

communicate personally with legislators at any time about any bill, but the committee hearing is the occasion when anyone may publicly approve, oppose, or suggest changes to a bill.

You can testify on any bill that concerns you. All committee hearings are scheduled at least three days in advance.

Committee hearings allow you to speak your mind before the committee takes any action and before the bill is brought to the attention of the House and Senate for debate and a final vote.

The purpose of committee hearings is to gather information so that the committee can make an informed recommendation on a given bill or resolution. Legislators were elected to represent citizens like you. They are eager to hear your thoughts and perspective. Don't be intimidated, and don't let stage fright stop you from taking this opportunity to participate in your government!

How to Find a Committee

During legislative sessions, each committee of the House and Senate is assigned to a specific meeting room in the Capitol. Occasionally, if a hearing is expected to attract a large crowd, it may be moved to a larger room. Such changes are noted on hearing schedules, and notices are placed outside the regular meeting rooms.

The time and place of every committee hearing is posted several days in advance on the boards reserved for that purpose in the legislative hallways. In addition, computer terminals are placed in the halls for the convenience of the public. You may use these terminals to get accurate, up-to-the-minute information on the status of each introduced bill. You may also call or visit the **Session Information Desk** in the first floor hall of the Capitol, (406) 444-4800 (during session only), or check hearing information on the Internet.

Printed schedules of each day's hearings are available at the Session Information Desk, and some major Montana newspapers print the hearing schedules each day of the session.

You may enter a legislative hearing room at any time, even if the door is closed or a hearing is in progress. The common standards of courtesy and respect apply; enter quietly if a meeting is in progress. Be sure to turn off your cell phone before entering. Food and drink (other than water) are not permitted in hearing rooms.

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How to Get a Copy of a Bill

During legislative sessions, copies of bills are available for a small charge in the **Bill Distribution Room** (Room 74) in the basement of the Capitol. Because a bill may be amended at many stages of its life, be sure you have the most recent version. Bills are also available electronically on this website through the Legislative Automated Workflow System, or LAWS. (Please note that the printed version of a bill is the official version; the electronic version may not be in its final form when posted.)

Know the Committee

You may find it helpful before attending a committee hearing to find out who the members are.

Members of all committees are appointed by legislative leaders before the opening of each session. Rosters are announced in the media, listed in various directories, and available online.

The speaker of the House or the Senate Committee on Committees designates the presiding officer and vice presiding officer of each committee. The presiding officer, or chair, conducts the hearing and applies the rules of the Legislature. The vice chair presides in the absence of the chair. Both are members of the party holding a majority of seats in the chamber that the committee represents.

A staff person from one of the Legislative Branch agencies is permanently assigned to each committee to provide professional assistance. Each committee also has a secretary assigned for the session to keep the record and perform clerical functions.

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Registering as a Lobbyist

In most cases, if you are being paid to support or oppose legislation, you must be licensed as a lobbyist by the Commissioner of Political Practices.

How a Hearing Works

Committee hearings are as informal and unpretentious as decorum allows.

Because the committee tries to consider several bills at each meeting, the chair will allot time for proponents and opponents of each measure. The chair also will call for informational witnesses. These are people who are neither for nor against a bill but who have objective information that may be useful to the committee as it deliberates. After all the testimony is over, the chair will allow committee members to ask questions of those who have testified.

Seating in committee rooms is limited, so plan to arrive a few minutes before the hearing begins to get a chair and reduce diversions after the meeting opens. Be

sure you turn off your cell phone before you enter. Sign the witness sheet for the committee record, indicating the number of the bill that you are interested in and whether you support or oppose it.

At a hearing with many prospective witnesses, there may not be time for everyone to testify. In that case, you may be asked to state only your name and whether you are a proponent or opponent. You can always submit written testimony to the committee, even if you are not given the opportunity to speak due to time constraints. If you know that several other people plan to offer testimony similar to yours, try to coordinate with them to eliminate time-consuming redundancy. You may even want to designate one or several representatives to speak on behalf of a group of people with a shared viewpoint.

Each bill hearing opens with the bill's sponsor explaining its purpose and background. The presiding officer will then ask to hear statements from proponents, followed by opponents and then informational witnesses, if there are any.

When your turn to testify comes, begin by addressing the presiding officer and committee members (for example, "Mr. Chairman, members of the committee...."). Then identify yourself by name, hometown, occupation, affiliation, or other information that will indicate your acquaintance with the subject. Be specific, confine your remarks to the subject at issue, and indicate clearly your reasons for supporting or opposing the bill.

You are strongly encouraged to provide a written copy of your testimony to committee members and the committee secretary, so that your testimony will become part of the official record. But do not let the fact that you have not prepared a written statement stop you from testifying.

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Media Coverage

Because all committee meetings are open to the public, members of the media may be present. Be aware that your statements may be quoted in the newspaper, or you may appear on television, either testifying or sitting in the audience.

Many committee meetings are broadcast by TVMT, a state government public-affairs broadcasting service. TVMT may distribute the televised proceedings to various Montana local access and public television stations. TVMT also broadcasts committee hearings on screens located throughout the Capitol.

Questions from the Committee

After witnesses have testified, the presiding officer will allow committee members to ask questions of them and the bill's sponsor. If you are called upon, respond directly. Start your response by addressing the presiding officer and then the legislator who asked the question ("Mr. Chairman, Senator So-and-so...."). Remember that only committee members are allowed to ask questions. You may speak only when called upon.

When committee members have concluded their questions, the sponsor will make a closing statement to end the hearing on that particular bill.

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Executive Action

The committee may hold hearings on more than one bill during a meeting. If the hearings do not take up all of the meeting time, the committee may go into

executive session to review the information that it has gathered and to discuss whether to recommend passage of the bills before it.

The executive session is open to the public. You are welcome to observe and listen, but you may not join in the discussion.

During the executive session, the members may express their views on the bill, propose and adopt or reject amendments, and finally take a recorded vote for a recommendation of "do pass" or "do not pass" or other action on the bill.

If time is short, the committee may wait to take executive action on a bill at a later meeting.



Contacting Legislators

[Telephone](#) | [Online](#) | [Mail](#) | [Fax](#)

Outside of a legislative session, the legislative branch does not maintain staff or facilities through which constituents may contact their legislators. Instead, constituents may contact legislators directly through any of the means listed under the Address and Email (if provided) headings on their individual webpages. Individual webpages may be found by clicking on a legislators name on the [legislative roster](#).

By Telephone

The 63rd Legislature convenes January 7. The Legislative Information Desk begins operation that day. Regular office hours during the session are 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to adjournment on Saturdays. Callers may leave messages for legislators or acquire general legislative information by calling the Information Desk at (406) 444-4800. Callers may leave messages for up to 5 individual legislators or 1 legislative committee per call.

Online

Please contact your legislator during session by using the [online message form](#).

By Mail

A well-written letter is one of the best ways to let your legislator know your thoughts and opinions about a particular issue. Here are some tips for getting your message across effectively:

- **Be brief.** Legislators have many demands on their time. They appreciate letters that are short and to the point.
- **Put the message in your own words.** Form letters and petitions don't have the same impact as personal, informed opinions.
- **Address your letter to a specific legislator or legislators.** Depending on your message, you may want to write to the sponsor of a bill, certain members of a committee, or your own legislators. Don't address your letter to the entire Legislature.
- **Identify bills** by their number, title, and sponsor.
- **Explain your position** on the bill and ask for the legislator's support or opposition.
- **Give any sources of information** that you use to make your point.
- **Include your name, address, and a little about who you are** (for example, where you work or what school you attend).

Address letters to:

Senator XXXX
Montana Senate
PO Box 200500
Helena, MT 59620-0500

or

Rep. XXXX
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

By Fax

During sessions:

House 406-444-4825
Senate 406-444-4875



Finding and Tracking Bills

You can find and track the progress of legislative bills from current and past sessions using a free online service called LAWS (Legislative Automated Workflow System).

Using LAWS, you can find:

- Complete **text** of legislative bills
- Up-to-date **status** of bills
- Committee hearing **schedules**
- **Agendas** for committee hearings & floor sessions
- House and Senate **votes** on bills

You can search the LAWS database using one or more of the following search criteria:

- General subject matter
- Keywords
- Bill number
- Bill sponsor
- Bill status

You can also create a **preference list**. This feature allows you to monitor any number of bills that are of particular interest to you by creating a free, password-protected online account.

You can sign up for notification by e-mail of public hearings scheduled for the bills on your preference lists.

To use LAWS, you will need a computer with internet access and an Adobe PDF reader (free download). Most public libraries have these if you don't.

For more information about using LAWS, visit the LAWS Help page.

