



State Legislative Candidate Questionnaire

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Candidate
Montana Senate District 46

The Missoula Organization of REALTORS® advocates for REALTORS® and consumers. Our members would like to know your thoughts on priority REALTOR® issues. We thank you for being specific in your responses.

ISSUES

Home prices in Missoula County have increased rapidly since the end of the economic downturn and incomes have not kept up. The median sales price of a home in 2019 was \$315,000, making it challenging for many Missoulian's to buy a home. The rapidly increasing price is due in part to a shortage of housing, particularly in more attainable price ranges. As a state legislator, you will evaluate policies that will impact housing and economic development in Missoula County.

Housing Development

State law broadly outlines the process by which local governments must review subdivisions of land. Subdivision is the primary vehicle for creating lots to be developed into homes for sale. Subdivision review policies attempt to balance communities' housing needs with protecting the environment, agriculture, wildlife habitat, public safety, and other interests. **What changes to Subdivision law do you support to encourage needed development of housing while balancing other community values?**

Affordable housing is a priority for me and for many Missoulians and Montanans. As I reach out to voters, I consistently hear about the current housing crisis, including property tax issues. While I encourage "Smart Growth" concepts of building up and not out in an effort to protect agricultural land, I also know that parking and other costly issues limit this practice. A balance is needed.

To solve these problems, we need to look at other communities who have successfully dealt with this issue and build upon their models to address the crisis while still thinking in the long-term. It is my understanding that creating subdivisions can take up to two years and can be an incredibly expensive process. We need to find ways to streamline the process and have consist policies in place so that homeownership is achievable. In short, this issue does need to be prioritized, we need to dig deep to find the shortcomings in the system and address them.

Regulatory reform may be one strategy for promoting housing affordability through state law. **Are there non-regulatory strategies that the legislature should pursue, so please enumerate? If strategies require funding, where should it come from?**

I am interested in learning about all options to promote housing affordability and prioritizing this issue. See my response below in the “Tax Law” section in response to funding strategies.

Tax Law

State Law provides for tax increment financing (TIF) and urban renewal districts. TIF is used within urban renewal districts to combat blight and promote economic development. However, critics of TIF say that these urban renewal districts can be in place for many years, and TIF diverts property tax revenue away from schools and county governments. Supporters respond that TIF grows the property tax base and creates jobs, and that once the urban renewal districts sunset, the taxing jurisdictions have significantly more revenue than they would have otherwise had. **What changes to TIF statues would you recommend responding citizen complaints and improve the program?**

(See response below.)

Property taxes are the primary revenue generator used to fund local government services. Recently increased mil levies multiplied by increasing property value assessments have left many homeowners asking for relief. **What are your thoughts on the current taxation structure for local government? What changes, if any, would you propose/support?**

I am in the process of studying the history of taxation in Montana and will address this issue. I have gone through the Montana Budget and Policy Center Training for candidates, have spoken with current and past legislators who serve(d) on Taxation committees as well as economists. As mentioned before, as I talk with voters and ask them about their issues and concerns, I consistently hear about taxes being an issue – we need reform in this area.

Economic Development

While the unemployment rate in Montana has been quite low for several years prior to the COVID pandemic, growth in wages has remained relatively stagnant compared to increases in housing costs. **As a state legislator, how would you propose to help grow and attract good paying jobs in Montana and specifically Missoula County?**

There are many approaches to incentivize a robust economy. My area of expertise is education; I served as a high school teacher, earned a doctorate in educational leadership, was education policy advisor to Governor Bullock and then dean of Missoula College. Investment in our workforce, through traditional education and work-based learning such as apprenticeships is one way to ensure our economy stays strong. Specific training and “soft-skills” are critical to ensure employers have the right people to work effectively and efficiently for prosperity for all.

Fair Housing

The National Association of REALTORS include sexual orientation and gender identity anti-discrimination language in their code of ethics. Montana does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity. **As a state legislator would you support legislation to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and /or gender identity?**

I will support legislation to prohibit discrimination. Basic human dignity is essential for survival in our community and society.