

Willis Curdy, Representative House District 98 (Target Range, Ft. Missoula, Orchard Homes, South Reserve Street Corridor)

Legislative Service- January 2015 to the Present (Three terms). Community service-Big Flat Irrigation District Commissioner 1983-1988; Missoula Rural Fire District Board of Trustees 1989-1993.

Fifty year Missoula County resident. Missoula County Public Schools educator 1971-2000. Wildland fire-fighter 1968 to 2007. Commercial pilot(U.S.Forest Service) and Flight Instructor. Co-owner Curdy Farm LLC.

Housing Development

Today, the subdivision review process is a long, complicated, and somewhat burdensome process. Some counties and local city governments have extended the review process resulting in frustration on the part of developers to initiate various housing projects. The State Legislature could establish more definitive parameters on the review process so that expectations for what is required are more consistent. Also it has been some time since the Legislature has taken a look at zoning legislation. Doing so could become very contentious but there is growing interest on the part of local governments and the building industry to review the issue.

I have supported having non-profits, private foundations and the state pool their financial resources into an affordable housing trust fund where private builders, non profits such as Habitat for Humanity, and local governments could tap the trust fund for affordable housing construction. State general fund money will probably not be available for this program, however, dollars from the Treasure State Endowment Program(TSEP) or Coal Tax Trust Fund money could augment an affordable housing trust fund. Any TSEP or Coal Tax Trust Fund would require low interest repayment where as the non-profit funds could come with low interest repayment or an outright grant.

Affordable housing is a critical part to growing Missoula's economy. Knowing that quality, affordable housing is available serves as a great incentive for businesses to relocate or expand.

Tax Law

Tax increment financing has generated criticism within the house district I represent especially the county portion of the district. Most comments involve criticizing the use TIF dollars to promote large national chain stores at the expense of locally owned businesses. I would support a change in who qualifies for TIF resources. As far as diverting money away from schools, the 2017 Legislature did change the law involving the diversion of property tax dollars from schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments are going to see their revenues drop. To help local governments pay for public safety programs until revenues turnaround, I would suggest allowing local governments to dip into the TIF program to pay for fire and police services.

The current taxation structure in Missoula and Montana in general is placing significant strain on local home owners and economic development. Previous legislatures have reduced taxes on a few property categories which in turn forced homeowners to pick up the difference. There is some anticipation that the ongoing Revenue Interim Committee review of our tax structure will result in some changes that if enacted should take the pressure off of local property taxpayers. The current local government reliance on property taxes is unsustainable. I have been reluctant to support local option sales taxes/resort taxes. However, after watching what those communities who utilize a special tax have done with the revenue earned through those taxes while providing for local property tax relief, I am willing to move to support those ideas. Also, the largest portion of property taxes is assessed by local schools. Montana needs to pay a larger portion of the day to day operation of schools while providing a way to fund school facility reconstruction/rehabilitation costs so that local home owners and businesses are not asked to bear the burden of paying for those projects.

The 2021 Legislature will also need to readjust the property value assessments so that the rising valuations on Montana resident home-owners do not result in higher property taxes.

Economic Development

National economists predict that the current pandemic will have major impact on our state and local economy for up to a decade. Numerous businesses closed by COVID-19 will not reopen. There is a strong likelihood that the economy as we know it will not return. So how do we approach this new economic world.

As a retired thirty-year classroom teacher in Missoula's urban high schools, I fully understand the connection between a highly educated, skilled worker and economic development. Even though Montana has good marks when it comes to supporting all levels of education, the state needs to "up the ante." Montana needs to make a greater commitment to apprenticeships and other job-training programs. Our colleges and universities will need to react to a new economic world by developing a course of study which accurately responds to a new economy. The Missoula Economic Partnership has been doing good work in convincing new businesses that Missoula is a great place to find quality employees. Along with the Missoula business community, I am committed to adequate education funding which will allow U of M and Missoula College to continue to deliver a highly skilled employee. Our K-12 education program requires that same commitment. Expanding our dual enrollment programs will develop skilled workers at an earlier age. In addition, Montana needs a public school pre-kindergarten program. Research documents the long-term advantage of such programs while freeing parents from significant child care costs.

Second, Montana needs to expand its commitment to our transportation and data oriented infrastructure. Our broadband infrastructure is piecemeal at best. I have and will continue to work to fund a broadband system which will encourage businesses to relocate to Montana while expanding their operations. Our transportation infrastructure is critical to commerce. During my three terms I have sponsored and supported legislation to expand spending for our streets, highways, and airports.

Finally, I am committed to the notion that Montana must continue to be Montana. Our outdoor recreational opportunities are attractive to visitors from around the world. Yet, that same recreational opportunity has and will continue to coax quality businesses to bring their operations here. As a life-long Montanan who uses our recreational assets, I am committed to providing access to our lakes, rivers, streams and public lands. Our environmental amenities are a critical recruiting tool. We must keep them available for everyone's use.

Fair Housing

I will support legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Discrimination against our LGBTQ citizens does not reflect the values expressed in Montana's State Constitution. Discrimination in housing should not happen to anyone especially our LGBTQ community.