

Montana Message

By Brad Longcake, Executive Director, Montana Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association

Greetings from the snow apocalypse ground zero, formerly known as Montana. As we brace ourselves against a record-breaking winter with frigid temperatures and mountains of snow, we are especially looking forward to **June 5th, 6th, and 7th** for our Annual Trade Show and Convention in beautiful Fairmont Hot Springs Resort. The sunshine and golf greens cannot come soon enough. During our fall board meeting a new committee for convention planning and member retention was created, and we are really excited for some big changes this year, setting out on a mission to make our annual meeting something to really look forward to. We are looking to bring a new energy to this invaluable opportunity to come together from across our great state and enjoy fun and fellowship. Perhaps the most exciting change will be the opportunity for all registered attendees to win a brand new ATV! We have a great line-up of speakers bringing a variety of expertise to share. As always, conference attendees will have the opportunity to show off their golf game. This year we have also added trap shooting for those who choose not to golf. We have a few more tricks up our sleeve as well to keep things interesting!

Recently, the Montana Hospital Association and the *American Heart Association* filed ballot language to pursue an initiative on the November ballot to increase the tobacco tax. The current extension of the income requirements for Montana Medicaid will sunset next year, requiring the 2019 Legislature to re-authorize the funding. Montana is facing lean times, just coming off a special session to address a significant budget deficit. The Montana Hospital Association and American Heart Association are looking to bring a vote to the public to raise the tax on a pack of cigarettes by two dollars and the wholesale price on all other tobacco products by 33%. The petition for the proposed initiative will need signatures from at least five percent of qualified voters from across the state by June 22nd. We will be keeping a close eye on this to protect the interest of our C-stores.

I took the opportunity to participate in *DEQs underground storage tank seminar* in Helena in February. It was a great opportunity to interact with DEQ staff and gain insight into their perspective during the evaluation of a location. There were a number of industry professionals in attendance and the question and answer session and interactions after the meeting allowed the group to work through the questions that had arisen during the seminar. This time spent with both DEQ and the consultants to gain insight into the process will be of great value to our stores, to better navigate workable solutions.

The 2018 WPMAEXPO was excellent as always. Chris Christie's keynote address was a very interesting look behind the scenes of the current administration. The rest of the seminars were also informative and enjoyable. The trade show was amazing, and between talking with the vendors as well as members, the days just flew by. The auction items for the scholarship fund were very impressive this year, and as always the WPMA staff did a great job. If you have not had the opportunity to participate in this event, I highly recommend it.