

Fall Magazine 2020

## *Montana Message* by Brad Longcake

*I hope this finds you and yours healthy.* There are a lot of words to describe 2020 thus far, most not appropriate for publication, but I think one of the most applicable is adaptation. Every facet of our lives has been altered this year and while it has been uncomfortable at best, we are witnessing and living the art of adaptation and resilience.

COVID-19 has forced us to harness technology to stay connected. As much as we all might shudder when we hear the word Zoom, it has afforded us a platform for advocacy and collaboration. MPMCSA has had a number of virtual round table meetings with the Montana Congressional Delegation to discuss the struggles facing marketers and C-stores this year. We were able to share concerns related to the corona virus relief plans, as well as liability protection for our stores during these unprecedented challenges. We appreciated the opportunity to address the impact of reduced fuel sales across our state and the nation, and its threat to infrastructure funding in general. This allowed us to voice our opposition to proposals regarding commercialization of rest stops. The consequences to our C-stores would be a crushing blow in an already difficult time.

We have continued to work closely with the collaborative group including DEQ, store owners, consultants and Petro Board staff for the ongoing legislative audit into the PTRCB. We are thankful for the opportunity to continue this process virtually biweekly. We are hopeful that the evaluation will illustrate the value of the fund to not only the members, but all parties involved in the remediation process.

Our biannual legislative session is scheduled to start in January. We are anticipating legislation related to tobacco, alcohol, local option fuel tax and a number of other issues pertinent to in-store daily operations. We are likely facing budget shortfalls and expect to see a lot of new proposed taxes. We are closely monitoring the November election for a number of state Senators and the entire state House of Representatives to better anticipate what may be coming in 2021. We are preparing for the possibility of a virtual legislature or a hybrid of virtual and in person.

Our Board of Directors has made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 Convention and Trade Show. As much as we value the time together for education and fellowship, the risk outweighs the reward this year. We are looking for alternatives this fall to connect with members and will announce plans in the coming weeks.

As we anticipate many more months of social distancing and virtual meetings, we hope you embrace the unexpected opportunities. Whether it is more time at home, finding new pastimes, or coming to work with business on the top and pajamas on the bottom, I hope we can all find something positive that comes out of our adaptation to 2020.

Brad Longcake

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