

Winter Magazine 2020

## *Montana Message* by Brad Longcake

***Greetings from the Big Sky State!*** We hope this fall finds you and yours healthy. It has been an unprecedented year, likely with more to come as we reach this November's election. All of Montana's House of Representative seats are up for reelection this year along with a number of Senate seats. We look forward to seeing the outcomes of each race and to welcoming back those winners we know, and meeting those that we do not. As of today, it is unclear how the 2021 Legislative session will proceed. Montana is in the midst of our first real surge of COVID-19 infections and our healthcare system is already feeling the strain. The session is scheduled to begin January 4th, 2021. Given the traditional format does not conform well to social distancing and capacity limitations, we are planning for all contingencies including a hybrid of in person meetings and testimony coupled with virtual. As has been the mantra of 2020, we will continue to adapt as needed to keep our members safe but also ensure we are seen and heard in Helena.

Our legislative audit continues to move forward. We are hoping to have some results by year's end. This will allow us to present the findings of the audit to the 2021 Legislature and continue to build relationships between the private and public sector.

As you may remember, in June Missoula County voters passed an initiative to add a two-cent tax on gasoline, slated to fund local infrastructure improvements. It officially went into effect in September and the local stores have started to collect. Both the county commissioners and the county treasurer have been slow to develop the process for collection. Thus far, the process has been plagued with problems related to reporting and uploading information into the county's website. MPMCSA has been working with attorneys to advocate for our members. We have sent a letter to the county commissioners, county treasurer and attorney general stressing the importance that the privacy of the sensitive and proprietary information be maintained. We have not heard back and will continue to keep everyone abreast of our progress.

Missoula has kept us busy this year! We are also working with a number of trade associations and industry partners to address a proposed flavor ban in the city of Missoula. The City Council has proposed banning all flavored tobacco products, as well as flavored nicotine products. The council's intent is to curb the use of these products in youth. We have been working to bring awareness to the national change in the minimum age requirement to buy such products, the stringent standards our industry has for preventing underage sales, and discuss the difference between the flavored tobacco products, flavored nicotine products, and flavored e-cigarettes. MPMCSA and local members have had a number of meetings with the city council and the mayor to bring awareness to the significant negative impact such a ban would impose on our local stores and businesses. We are working diligently with the city council to find a solution that will satisfy both the city and the local retailers.

As we head into the holiday season, one that will likely be very different from normal, the MPMCSA wishes you all the very best. 2020 has been turbulent, but from hardship comes growth and perspective. I imagine that we all have a better appreciation for a friendly handshake and a face to face conversation. We hope you continue to adapt and find silver linings.

Brad Longcake, Executive Director MPMCSA