

Summer Magazine 2021

## *Montana Message* by Brad Longcake

***Springtime greetings from Montana!*** There is nothing better than green grass and sunshine after a long winter. This spring seems especially promising as our worlds are opening up and we are starting to get back to “normal.”

The 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Montana Legislature wrapped up April 29th. It was a first of its kind that functioned as a hybrid model with the majority of the legislative body in session at the Capitol but with the option for virtual participation for both legislators and constituents. There were a record number of bills moved through both chambers and some particularly important issues pertaining to our industry were addressed. The MPMCSA was able to carry legislation (HB 464) to repeal local government’s ability to impose a local option fuel tax. The measure will repeal the two-cent local option tax implemented in Missoula County in 2020 and will prohibit any future attempts in other counties. This is a huge accomplishment for the MPMCSA.

The Petro Fund was once again under siege from legislators and the Department of Environmental Quality. We were able to protect the fund from the countless attempts to redirect funding to DEQ. This funding would have been used at the department’s discretion, not strictly for underground storage tank remediation. A similar attempt during the 2019 session resulted in one million dollars being redirected over the biennium. This year the intent was to take 1.5 million every year moving forward. We plan to try to work out some of the issues during the interim committees to try to mitigate this continued attack every session. MPMCSA continues to work closely with a group of stakeholders to promote the importance of the fund and ensure this money is protected and used for what it is intended.

MPMCSA weighed in on a variety of issues facing our stores and marketers. We were able to offer support for Governor Gianforte in his first order of business pushing legislation to institute liability protections for businesses in relation to COVID-19. Over the course of the session, we were also able to offer support for his tax plans that included increases in the business equipment tax deductions, work force training programs, and other significant tax breaks for businesses. This session focused on removing or eliminating many of the local issues that were causing undue stress to businesses. Working with a variety of our trade association partners we were able to accomplish many of these items.

We had a few landmark wins this session, and helping to pass SB 398, addressing preemption for alternative nicotine products and other tobacco items, was one of them. This bill highlights the amount of effort everyone at the MPMCSA put into this session and demonstrates our work to remove some cumbersome overregulation at a local level. As always, the session was fast and furious, and it is always nice to see it end!

We are really looking forward to our annual convention and trade show in Fairmont this June 8-9th. After missing out in 2020, it will be especially enjoyable to see everyone and have some fun. Attendees will be able to choose to shoot trap or golf at the beautiful Old Works course in Anaconda on Tuesday again this year. We have a great line up of guests and speakers set to attend Wednesday’s educational sessions.

We had an outstanding legislative session this year and were able to accomplish some truly amazing feats. We were instrumental in passing some landmark legislation that will benefit all MPMCSA businesses. It was truly an honor to represent, in my opinion, the best industry at the capital, and I am proud to say that I am a part of the organization.