

*Greetings from Montana,* We would be lying if we didn't admit to welcoming this fall weather with open arms. This summer was brutal for our great state. Across the state residents faced one of the worst droughts in recent memory, creating hardship for our neighbors - especially those in the agriculture industry. It also led to prime conditions for a wildfire season officials are calling a 100-year event. Over a million acres burned, thousands of residents were displaced from their homes, some for months, and two brave firefighters lost their lives in their valiant effort to protect others. An early fall snowfall has brought much needed relief but now we face the next chapter of the crisis with the state facing an incredible budget shortfall. The state has used all of the available wildfire suppression funding and emergency funds this year. It is very likely we will see a special session of the legislature called to address budget cuts and increasing revenue. Whenever tax increases are proposed, our industry is usually in the crosshairs. We are already hearing talk of reviving pursuit of an increase in the tobacco tax, and we again will plan to work with our industry allies to protect Montana's convenience stores from an even greater disparity compared to neighboring states.

In more positive news, we recently had some changes in our board of directors. Ron May, who was serving as our current President is moving on to the next chapter of his life, away from the convenience store business, and has stepped down. We wish Ron all the best. We are fortunate to have Kary Tonjum step back in to the role to finish out the current term. We are also very excited to welcome a new board member, Scott Curry of Valier, owner of One Stop Convenience and manager for Ben Taylor, Inc in Valier.

Last month I was able to attend the WPMA Fall Board Meeting. I had the opportunity to discuss many different topics with our western region counterparts. The yearend audits and financials were reviewed for each state and the importance of having members participate at the WPMA meeting in Vegas was reiterated. There were a number of committee meeting reports discussed as well as a few questions that were brought up to be discussed at the PMAA fall board meeting. At our state executives meeting, we reviewed a variety of issues that affected the states during the current legislative session. Being able to share successes and challenges helps to prevent the need to create the wheel on issues. The time spent strategizing and working through these issues is invaluable to staying on top of the current topics and gives us a heads up as to what might be coming to our states. The PMAA fall board meeting in Chicago was a huge success. We had the opportunity to network with all of the states across the country and discuss a number of topics.

Immediately following the PMAA meeting is the NACS Convention and Trade Show. If you have never attended, I highly recommend it. The conference is a great update on issues our industry is facing from around the country, and the trade show is amazing. The sheer size is mind-blowing, let alone the incredible displays. I particularly enjoyed the Budweiser Clydesdale horses right in the middle of the convention center. It is always exciting and inspiring to spend time to see and hear the latest and greatest about all of the products and items that are new and improved for not only the retail part of the business, but also all items relating to fuel.

This winter and spring look to be busy with new member recruitment, legislative meetings, and a possible special session, but rest assured MPMCSA is out working to keep the best interests of the association at the forefront of these interactions.

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