

2015

MONTANA

Economic
Development
Report



“The state of
MONTANA’S
 economy is
 strong.”

-Governor Steve Bullock

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Honorable Governor Steve Bullock,

One year ago on this date, you delivered the 2015 State of the State Address to the Montana Legislature. Today, I am pleased to present you with the following report summarizing the state of economic development in Montana. It is my pleasure to report that the overall state of economic development in Montana continues to be strong. My staff in the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED), working with departments throughout state government and our counterparts in the private sector have worked diligently to present an accurate picture of Montana's economy. The thoroughness and accuracy are, in large part, thanks to the help of others, and I am truly thankful for their assistance.

This is an exciting time for the state of Montana. We are experiencing strong business and employment growth, increasing wages, and expanding industries. Unemployment levels are nearly a full percentage point below the national average at 4 percent, and more Montanans are at work all across the state than ever before. Over the past few years, Montana has been consistently ranked among the top 10 in the nation for entrepreneurship, business climate, tax fairness, government responsibility, and income growth. Indeed, our state ranks within the top ten in nearly every economic category. While our economy and wages are growing in the private sector, in the public sector we are cutting waste, challenging every expense, aligning with the needs of the private sector, and eliminating unnecessary regulations and red tape.

With this news, it would be easy to kick up our feet and congratulate ourselves on a job well done. But we know that's not good enough in Montana. With this report, we see opportunities to build upon this as a foundation to grow Montana's economy even further.

Respectfully,

John Rogers

Chief Business Development Officer

**Key Takeaways:**

- **MORE & BETTER JOBS**
More Than 10,000 Jobs Added in 2015
- **HIGHER WAGES**
One of the Highest Rates of Wage Growth in the Nation
- **LOWER UNEMPLOYMENT**
Unemployment Rate at 4%
- One Full Point Lower than the National Average
- **5TH FASTEST GDP GROWTH**
Over 5 Years
- **BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE**
Making Montana More Effective, Efficient & Business-Friendly



2015

MONTANA

Economic
Rankings



#1

Rate of Entrepreneurship
(Kauffman Foundation)

#1

State Fiscal Prudence
(JP Morgan)

#1

Place to Live the American Dream
(Xavier University)

#1

Lowest Sales Tax Rate
No Sales Tax
(Sales Tax Institute)

#2

Population over 25 with at least a High School Education
(US Census)

#3

Export Growth
(US Chamber of Commerce)

#5

Wellbeing Index
(Gallup)

#6

Innovation & Entrepreneurship
(US Chamber of Commerce)

#6

Business Tax Climate
(Tax Foundation)

#6

Long Term Job Growth
(US Chamber of Commerce)

#6

Per Capita Income Growth
(US Chamber of Commerce)

#6

Percentage of Renewable Energy
(US EIA)

#8

Small Business Innovation Research Grants per Worker
(SBA)

#9

Small Business Lending
(US Chamber of Commerce)

#10

Business Climate
(US Chamber of Commerce)



2015

MONTANA

Employment
Trends



“There may be no better working conditions on the planet than September in Montana.” -Safra Catz, President and CEO at Oracle.

The Main Street Montana Project was launched to create collaborations with private sector industries, streamline government regulations and build a business plan to lead Montana. We listened to what private sector leaders wanted and needed and the results are paying off. Innovative partnerships with Montana’s private sector businesses and the Montana University System will train tomorrow’s workforce will provide the services businesses need to prosper throughout the state.

Private sector industry experienced employment increases during 2015. Construction has been one of Montana’s fastest growing industries with employment growth at 5.3% over the year and 1,300 jobs added, a welcome sign for an industry recovering from losses created during the Great Recession.

Last year was an excellent year to be a worker in Montana and the outlook remains positive for 2016. **Statewide unemployment rates fluctuated between 3.9% and 4.4% throughout the year** and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics placed Montana’s unemployment rate at 4% as of December 2015. Thanks in large part to these low unemployment numbers, Montana was able to significantly lower employers’ unemployment insurance contribution rates. This will save employers an annual average of \$106.80 per employee, based on an employee income of \$30,500.

In conjunction with an unemployment rate a full percentage point below the national average and near what most economists consider “ideal,” wages in Montana continued to grow at one of the fastest rates in the nation. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, **over 10,000 jobs were created in Montana in 2015**, an increase of 2.1%. Over that same period **wages increased by 3.5%** and Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 4.5%. During the last five years, Montana has the 5th fastest GDP growth and 6th fastest personal income growth in the nation.

Montana’s workers are realizing higher wages and paychecks are going further—thanks in part to our low unemployment rates—while our businesses are seeing strong output growth. Though these trends are positive, we must continue to ensure our educational system and other workforce training programs are responsive to the changing needs of industry. A well trained and educated workforce is crucial in continuing these positive trends.

One specific tool Montana is using to grow and strengthen our workforce pipeline is through the time tested training model of apprenticeships. The numbers for the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program show the importance of this workforce training model through almost 1,300 active apprentices receiving training in 49 occupations, and almost 700 union and non-union business sponsors throughout the state.

Due to the continued strong economy and job growth, Montana businesses cannot afford to wait 2, 4, or 6 years for a fully trained worker. We are collaborating at unprecedented levels with the Montana University System, private sector employers and other public sector workforce partners to create individualized training programs for Montana businesses.

4% Unemployment Rate

10k+ New Job Creation



2015



Main Street
MONTANA
Project



“Through the governor’s Main Street Montana Project, this legacy initiative is anticipated to further enhance Montana’s business-friendly culture, broadening the state’s prospects to diversify its economy while sparking new innovation needed to support emerging industries.”

-Carolyn Cawley, Managing Director U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

The Main Street Montana Project continues to be a driving force in an unprecedented partnership between the private sector and state government.

A key component of the Main Street Montana Project is the creation of Key Industry Networks (KINs), comprised of leaders from within that industry across the state. Using the Project’s five Pillars as the frame of reference, the KINs are tasked with identifying the priorities that are most essential to the success of the businesses within their industry.

To date, the state has convened nine KINs made up of over 200 Montana business owners and executives. Eight of the KINs have met and finalized their recommendations for the Governor. These recommendations contain a wealth of advice from the private sector on how the state will facilitate business growth.

Successful work on the KIN recommendations is already underway. The Health & Wellness KIN recommendation to expand access to healthcare was successful – providing access to health insurance for 70,000 additional Montanans. The Governor has acted on the Energy KIN recommendation for a Clean Power Advisory group; and Energy KIN members are working directly with the State to improve facility siting.

In addition to the Key Industry Network recommendations, the Main Street Montana Project has created innovative new partnerships between businesses, educators, and workforce development professionals to ensure we continue to develop a workforce that meets the demands of the state’s growing industries, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing,

and technology. The state has partnered with the private sector like never before, preparing tomorrow’s workforce today. **The state has facilitated connections between 1,000 apprenticeships and 500 employers** and has shortened the time it takes to earn degrees and certifications. This work has only just begun and will help ensure the state can help the private sector meet the ever growing need for skilled workers.

A recurring theme heard throughout the Main Street Montana Project was the need for government at all levels to be more responsive to the needs of businesses by streamlining duplicative, outdated and ineffectual rules and regulations. To that end, **460 such agency and board rules have been repealed and 1452 have been revised** to make state government more efficient and effective.

\$40 MILLION Received in Training Dollars for Tomorrow’s Workforce

460 Rules Repealed

1452 Rules Revised



2015

MONTANA

Small Business &
Entrepreneurship



“Silicon Valley gets all the glory, but the real hotbed of American entrepreneurship appears to be a few hundred miles to the northeast: Montana.”

-New York Times, June 17, 2015

Montana's economy depends on entrepreneurs to provide jobs, opportunities and inspiration for others. For the third consecutive year, the Kauffman Foundation named Montana the number one state for entrepreneurship. Based on recommendations from the Main Street Montana Project, the Governor's Office of Economic Development recently released the Business Navigator, a tool for entrepreneurs and small business owners. The Business Navigator is an online tool that guides prospective business owners and entrepreneurs through a streamlined process for identifying the necessary registrations, licenses, permits, and resources needed to start a business in Montana.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs are a major driving force of Montana's economy. Montana has 30,641 small businesses and roughly 120,173 Montanans are self-employed workers. Over 99% of businesses in the state are classified as “small” and 89.65% of all employment in the state is in small business. Just over 40% of the state's wage and salary jobs are with firms employing fewer than 20 people—and about 75% are with businesses employing fewer than 100 people. **Nationally, as in Montana, small businesses account for the largest proportion of new job creation.**

In the past, the lack of home-grown venture capital and angel investors has been a challenge to start-ups. But with the burgeoning number of entrepreneurs, **Montana's critical mass is attracting the interest of venture capital and angel investors.** Joining the Frontier Angel Fund this year, the Missoula Economic Partnership recently announced the formation of new Angel Network. The Next Frontier Capital Fund, a Montana-based \$20 million venture capital fund, was also announced this year and has made its initial placement.

A key to the success of Montana's entrepreneurs is the connectivity to resources they enjoy within the state. Commonly known as the “entrepreneurship ecosystem,” a networked support system starts with the state's economic development community including local and regional economic development organizations, supported by Small Business Development Centers, a Business Attraction, Expansion, and Retention Program, and the Blackstone Launchpad, providing counseling to entrepreneurs all across the state.

Main Street Highlight:

- The Business Navigator online site – allowing an entrepreneur to establish a business quickly – was developed through a partnership with the Small Business KIN.

30,641

Number of Small
Businesses in Montana

99%

of Businesses in
Montana are Classified
as “Small”

\$20 MILLION

Venture Capital Fund
Announced



2015

MONTANA

Innovation
& Technology



“Montana’s growing technology sector is something to get excited about. Homegrown startups are emerging all over the state, spurred by a new generation of Montana entrepreneurs. They’re being joined by veterans from Silicon Valley who are relocating to enjoy the magic of Montana. And we’re only at the first stages of the development of a thriving technology sector that has huge potential to create new employment opportunities and spur economic growth.”

-Missoulian, April 16, 2015

Montana’s technology industry sector is growing at a fast pace. From data analytics and remote sensing, to pharmaceuticals and high-tech instrumentation, Montana technology companies are making a difference in the state’s economy.

Montana’s investments in technology are contributing to significant diversification of Montana’s economy. In 2015, the state provided research grants of more than \$15 million for technologies that show substantial promise of commercialization and have the potential to enhance one or more sectors of Montana’s economy.

One of Montana’s little known but incredible success stories has been in the bioscience industry, which employs more than 2,500 while operating 368 businesses across the state. State inventors claimed more than 158 patents in bioscience and related technology areas including drugs and pharmaceuticals, surgical and medical instruments, and biochemistry.

The photonics industry in Montana consisted of 29 businesses and employed approximately 517 people at the end of 2014. Employment within the industry was expected to grow approximately 11% in 2015. The average pay and benefits within the industry was approximately \$59,461 at the end of 2014.

Montana’s technology-based economic clusters are supported by organizations such as the Montana Photonics Industry Alliance and the Montana BioScience Alliance, both of which promote their industry worldwide. The formation of these Alliances was supported by the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and both organizations are good examples of effective public-private partnerships.

Main Street Highlight:

- Governor Bullock led successful efforts to secure \$15 million in additional funds for research that is creating new commercial products and patented technologies.

11%

Estimated Growth
in the Photonics
Industry in 2015

368

of Bioscience
business
establishments

\$15 MILLION

In State Provided
Research Grants



2015

MONTANA

Agriculture



“As prehistoric peoples and American Indians have known for millennia, the land is the foundation and the focus of life in Montana.”

-Dave Walter, Historian

Montana agriculture is one of the most critical industries in the state, with \$5.275 billion in production value in 2014, a 7% increase over 2012. Agriculture supports rural communities across the state, with 27,800 family farms and ranches. **Our clean water and air and wide-open spaces produce some of the highest quality agricultural products in the world.** Montana's high protein wheat is frequently blended with other wheats to raise quality. Montana is a leading producer of wheat, certified organic wheat, pulse crops, beef cattle, flax, and honey.

Montana is ranked #2 in the U.S. for total organic acres with \$43.7 million in sales in 2014 – a 72% increase from 2008. We consistently rank in the top of the locavore index, currently #7, for local food sales from the farm directly to consumers. In addition, **Montana has recently moved into the #1 spot for production of pulse crops: peas, lentils, and chickpeas.**

Since 2012, Food and Agricultural Development Centers have leveraged \$5.19 million in investment funds for development, counseled 521 businesses, created 165 and retained 70 jobs, expanded 29 businesses and 25 new business start-ups, and helped bring 50 new products to market.

Since 2013, Montana's Specialty Crop Block Grant has invested: \$453,619 to help Montana farmers comply with new federal food and farm safety regulations; \$167,791 in research on colony collapse disorder in honey bees; \$653,043 to support research on pest and disease management for farmers; \$112,340 in establishing Montana's organic seed industry; and \$176,000 to ensure that the Montana potato lab remains one of the premier facilities in the nation for disease testing.

Commodity production has long been and continues to be the driving force behind the Montana agriculture industry, but Montanans are increasingly adding value to the products grown and raised in our state. The brewing and distilling industry continued to grow at an incredible rate in 2015, for example, there were over 50 breweries in the state at the end of 2015 employing over 500 people and contributing over \$60 million annually to Montana's economy.

\$5+
BILLION

**in 2014 Agricultural
Production Value**

#1

PULSE CROPS

Peas, Lentils & Chickpeas

#2

**in the Nation for
Total Organic
Acres**

\$60
MILLION

**Economic Contribution from
Craft Brewing Industry**



2015

MONTANA

Tourism & Recreation



“*I’m in love with Montana. For other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, even some affection. But with Montana it is love.*”
 -John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*

Montana’s open spaces and pristine natural wonders are what make living in the Big Sky special to its residents. **Maintaining our public lands and recreation resources remains the highest priority and that has contributed significantly to our economy**, as well. Tourism is virtually “recession proof,” stimulating Montana’s economy while preserving its sustainability.

“**It’s Time**” is the new marketing campaign the Montana Office of Tourism launched in 2015, and it rings true a number of ways. After 20 years of using the same digital infrastructure to market Montana, the Montana Office of Tourism decided it was also time to build a new state-of-the-art website from the ground up. VisitMT.com is the go-to source for more than 2 million users per year who are learning about Montana for the first time, planning a vacation, or who are already here and looking for more ways to make the most of their time under the big sky.

According to preliminary figures from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana, 11.7 million visitors last year agreed it’s time to visit Montana, **adding \$3.6 billion to the state’s economy**. Montana’s premier tourism destinations, Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, welcomed an all-time attendance record number of people for the second year in a row. The numbers show that **a record 2,366,056 people visited Glacier National Park last year while Yellowstone National Park’s 4,097,710 visitors were the highest ever, up more than 16 percent from 2014.**

State parks in Montana saw a third consecutive year of record use in 2015 thanks in part to strong visitation during the off-peak seasons, officials say. Montana’s state parks recorded more than 2.48 million visitors last year — up 11% from the previous record in 2014 and 34% above the 10-year average.

Montana’s wide open spaces and public lands contribute significantly to the overall economy. According to a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) survey, **hunters and anglers in Montana spend nearly \$1.3 billion annually** in the state on trip related expenditures. Besides adding to the quality of life in Montana, tourism and recreation contributes significantly to the overall economic well-being of its residents.

2

MILLION

Users Visit VisitMT.com
Per Year

11.7

MILLION

Visitors Came to
Montana in 2015

2015

Highest Visitation
Year on Record

\$3.6

BILLION

Amount that Tourism
Added to the State’s
Economy in 2015



2015

MONTANA

International Trade



“ We got a distributor in Taiwan and they look like a great partner for us. They’re technically competent and we’re really excited about working with them and selling our products in Taiwan.”

-Adam Stern, Resonon Incorporated

Export markets are vitally important for Montana’s small businesses. As a company identifies and pursues markets outside the United States, they take advantage of an international market consisting of 95% of the world’s consumers - 80% of the world’s buying power is outside of the United States - hedging against domestic sales slumps, creating jobs, and becoming more competitive in all their markets.

The 2014 data (latest available) indicates **Montana exported \$1.53 billion in manufactured goods and commodities.** Montana’s top categories for exports were in bulk wheat, mineral fuels (e.g. coal and crude oil), and inorganic chemicals (e.g. copper oxides and silicon). The top three countries receiving Montana goods were Canada, South Korea and China.

As a result of Governor Bullock’s trade mission to China in 2014, the Montana Department of Commerce hosted two inbound investment seminars during 2015. These seminars served as a connecting point for over 20 Chinese investors and more than 30 Montana companies seeking funding for various business ventures. These projects included opportunities in tourism, trade promotion, and investment as well as opportunities for direct sales and distribution of Montana products. The trade mission to China also resulted in the Inaugural U.S. China Clean Coal Industry Forum held in Billings **where an agreement between the U.S. Department of Energy and China’s National Energy Administration to increase the sharing of clean coal research data was announced.**

During 2015, Governor Bullock led a business delegation to South Korea and Taiwan that strengthened relationships and expanded trade opportunities in two of Montana’s significant export markets. The delegation was composed of representatives from agriculture (beef, grain, and organic grains), tourism, higher education, and a variety of small businesses. Their goal was to promote Montana as a destination, conduct targeted business meetings to expand trade, attract students to our schools, and further our sister-state ties. These goals are already being met with **Montana companies signing distribution deals, increased tourism numbers from the countries targeted, and a number of ongoing negotiations aimed at providing increased trade opportunities based on the delegation’s trip.**

Main Street Highlight:

- The Department of Commerce provided 103 marketing grants to Montana companies for exhibiting at international trade shows, translating marketing materials, and participating in business matchmaking activities.

Top EXPORTS

Bulk Wheat, Mineral Fuels & Inorganic Chemicals

Top IMPORTERS

Canada, South Korea & China

\$1.53 BILLION

in Exported Manufactured Goods and Commodities in 2014



2015

MONTANA

Manufacturing



“There is so much innovation and technology being developed in Montana.” -Alan Mullaly, CEO of Ford Motors

Montanans have a long history of being “makers” - people who have the skills and knowledge to create the products that make our lives easier and our future brighter. That ingenuity extends into the state’s manufacturing industry.

According to the latest figures reported by the National Association of Manufacturers, Montana’s Manufacturers help to drive the state’s economy, with \$1.01 billion in manufactured goods exports in 2014. Small businesses comprised 85% of all manufacturing exporters in Montana. According to the 2015 Edition of the State of Montana Manufacturing Report, there were 3,262 manufacturers. The largest categories were miscellaneous manufacturing with 680 establishments, fabricated metal manufacturing with 482 and food products with 360.

Manufacturers in Montana account for nearly 7% of the total output in the state, employing just over 4% of the workforce. Total output from manufacturing was \$2.9 billion in 2013. In addition, there were 19,300 manufacturing employees in Montana, with an average annual compensation of \$46,841.

Overall, manufacturing employment increased twice as fast as earnings in the post-recession period. The average Montana manufacturing worker earned about 19% higher than the average for all workers. The highest average wages within manufacturing reported were \$107,151 in petroleum and coal products.

Despite closures of two large manufacturing facilities early in the decade, the future of manufacturing in Montana is on the right track and becoming increasingly diversified. Aerospace manufacturing is a notable example: Boeing purchased and expanded a facility in Helena and SeaCast Inc. is in a joint venture with GE Aviation in Butte. At the same time many small Montana manufacturers are successful integrating into the supply chain of the aerospace industry.

\$107+
THOUSAND

Highest Annual Wages
in Petroleum & Coal
Products

\$1.01
BILLION

in Manufactured Goods
Exported in 2014

3,262

of Manufacturing
Establishments

85%

of Manufacturing Exporters
are Small Businesses



2015

MONTANA

Natural Resources & Energy



“This is, after all, still the Treasure State.” *-Associated Press 2014*

Montana has a diverse portfolio of energy and natural resource industries that have long been part of the economic foundation of the state. These include coal, oil & gas, minerals and timber resources as well as a legacy of coal and hydroelectric power generation augmented with the addition of increasing amounts of wind generation.

Despite a drop in prices both nationally and internationally, **production of crude oil and coal in Montana remained relatively steady in 2015 as compared to 2014.**

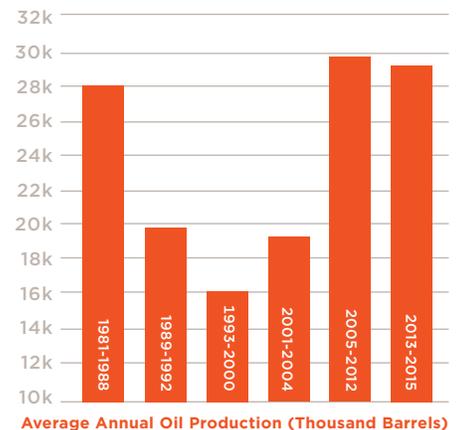
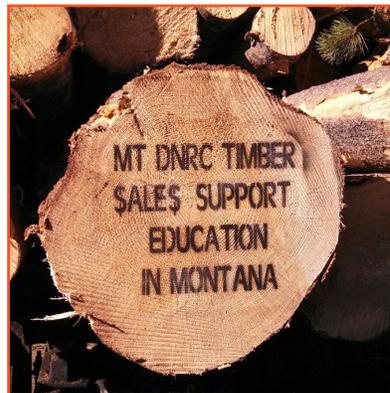
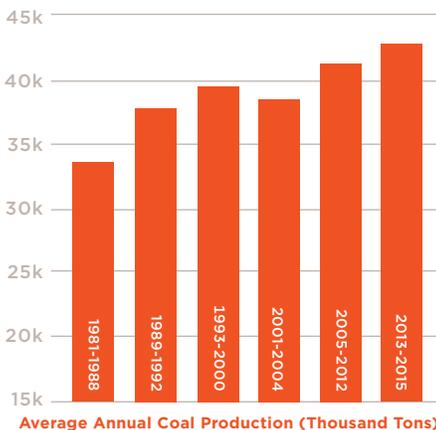
Significant investments to three of Montana’s oil refineries have taken place in 2015 and will continue into 2016 and beyond. CHS Inc. reports that a \$400 million upgrade is underway at its oil refinery in Laurel to boost diesel production and efficiency. In 2015, Calumet Montana Refining in Great Falls has been in the midst of a \$275 million expansion that will more than double production from 10,000 to 25,000 barrels per day and create an additional 30 jobs. In addition, Phillips 66 is currently spending several hundred million dollars on improvements to its Billings refinery. The project will generate an average of 200 construction jobs on site with a peak construction workforce of 350 over the next year. **In total, around \$1 billion is expected to be invested in these refinery projects.**

The U.S. wood products industry—Montana being no exception—has confronted numerous challenges in recent years. The State of Montana has established programs to provide support to this vital industry including the Wood Products Revolving Loan program. This fund has assisted over 20 Montana companies with an average employment increase of 28.1% across companies assisted.

The Governor launched the Forests in Focus initiative to support this vital industry while encouraging healthy forests and fuel reductions. This program has supported approximately 550 direct jobs in the timber industry on Federal USFS lands and nearly 200 direct jobs on state, private and tribal lands.

While Montana’s wind energy potential remains the best in the West and among the highest of any state, there were no new projects completed in 2015. There are currently a number of late stage wind energy developments that have the potential to more than double Montana’s wind energy capacity in the next two to three years. Additionally, Montana is also seeing real interest from commercial scale solar developers that may come to fruition in the near term.

While 2015 was marked by serious macro-economic upheaval related to commodities, Montana energy production remained steady and major refinery investments were a bright spot for energy and natural resources.



2015

MONTANA

Healthcare



“This [HELP Act] will mean more medical jobs in the state, and more people receiving health coverage. That’s a good thing.” -Great Falls Tribune Editorial Board

More than 67,000 Montanans are employed in the healthcare industry, making this sector one of the largest employers in the state. The healthcare industry has a direct impact of \$4.9 billion dollars and an estimated total gross economic output of \$6.8 billion for Montana. By nearly all measures, the healthcare industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the state and is projected to maintain that status during the next decade.

Montana’s landmark Medicaid expansion bill, the 2015 HELP Act, has helped small and medium-size community hospitals maintain viability. This legislation creates a system for all Montanans to have access to medical insurance, greatly reducing the prior burden on hospitals that did not receive payments for many of their services.

For employers, reduced employee down-time can be achieved by offering preventative health care instead of treatment in emergency rooms; something quite common among uninsured workers. At the time of this writing, 55,000 Montanans have signed up for the Affordable Care Act. Estimates indicate Montana’s previous uninsured rate was approximately 20% and is expected to decrease to around 10-12% by 2018.

In addition to providing access to healthcare for Montanans, the HELP Act also created a free workforce program for those covered under the Montana HELP Plan. HELP-link connects Medicaid enrollees with high quality workforce training, employment services, and job openings in their local communities.

Across the state, investments in medical facilities reflect the growth of Montana’s healthcare industry, including:

- In Livingston, a new \$43.5 million critical-access hospital and clinic was opened in October 2015.
- St. James Healthcare in Butte invested more than \$10 million in a 98-bed acute care facility
- An \$11 million state-of-the-art surgical unit opened at the Community Hospital of Anaconda;
- An 8,800-square-foot, \$9.3 million pediatric unit Billings Clinic’s was added to its downtown campus.

The Montana Department of Labor & Industry, the Montana University System, and healthcare employers around the state have aligned in unprecedented ways to train, recruit, and retain healthcare professionals in rural and frontier Montana by:

- Assisting prospective students to identify and access pathways toward a healthcare certificate or 2-year degree, including developing core curriculum design for common program requirements decreasing student cost and time to advance in or change career pathways.
- Developing an accelerated nursing curriculum to guide healthcare providers toward higher levels of practice and to ease the nursing shortage in Montana leading to a 20-25% reduction in time and up to \$16,599 reduction in cost for Practical Nursing and Associate of Science Registered Nursing.
- Increasing opportunities for on-the-job training by developing healthcare apprenticeships allowing students to earn while they learn.

These healthcare training programs are being led by the HealthCare Montana Project, funded by a \$15 Million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. This innovative program is the result of a partnership between the healthcare industry, Montana Department of Labor & Industry, and Montana’s two-year colleges. This collaboration continues to systematically streamline career pathways into health occupations, so Montanans are provided with the quality healthcare they need.



2015

MONTANA

Outlook



Montana's economy is strong and the state's ability to work collaboratively through our economic development programs has never been better. There is a lot to be excited about right now, from a government that lives within its means, businesses that are constantly innovating and leading the nation, to a growing, highly-skilled workforce that can compete in the global market. Continued economic diversification and job creation has led to historic numbers of Montanans working, consistent and strong wage growth, as well as best in the nation opportunities to start a new business. Today, there are job opportunities in Montana that did not exist a generation ago. With growing education, healthcare, construction, technology and business and professional services careers, Montana's economy looks to continue this trend of diversification in the coming years.

With these new opportunities, more Montanans have the chance to earn a living and start a family in the Big Sky state while remaining competitive nationally and internationally. These new opportunities do not come without challenges, however. We must continue to invest in our education systems to ensure the workforce our economy needs both today and into the future. New and improved apprenticeship programs, affordable college and certification programs in the Montana University System, and continued growth in dual enrollment courses for high school students will ensure this workforce is available to meet the changing dynamics of a modern, diversified Montana economy.

As the economy grows and expands into new opportunities, we must also focus on the importance of our long-standing natural resource and agriculture economies. Investments in the research needed to improve yields and profitability of our farms and ranches is a critical component to succeed in a globalized agricultural economy. Further, certain commodity production levels have been at or near historic highs, but global market challenges and external forces are curtailing this trend. As the global market for energy shifts, the state must focus on sparking innovation, economic growth and good-paying jobs across the energy sector, from wind and solar to other renewables to coal that generates less carbon.

As this report indicates, Montana's economy is on a solid foundation and is poised for significant growth in a variety of sectors. This presents incredible opportunities for the next generation of Montanans, and the State of Montana is working diligently with the private sector in making sure the workers of tomorrow are prepared to move into high-paying fields such as healthcare, energy development, and advanced manufacturing. Opportunities for economic growth and diversification continue to present themselves in all areas of Montana's economy and we will work hard to carry the momentum of 2015 through 2016 and beyond.

Through the ongoing efforts of the Main Street Montana Project, the public sector will continue to work hand in hand with the private sector to:

- Train and educate tomorrow's workforce today, from early-childhood to adulthood;
- Build on our economic foundation by responsibly managing our state's natural resources while preserving Montana's outdoor heritage and way of life;
- Continue to cut red tape and minimizing bureaucracy to ensure Montana remains one of the most business-friendly states in the country;
- Market Montana as a place to visit, live, work, start a business, and start a family;
- Encourage innovation in new and emerging as well as traditional industries across Montana.

