



Economic opportunity for all Montanans Policy White Paper September 26, 2018

Montana's unemployment rate has been declining steadily since 2011.¹ While job growth has held steady, our economy is still not lifting up all Montanans. Too many people, particularly young adults and families, need to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Healthcare costs are bankrupting families and the recovery has passed by areas of Montana. On the Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation, for example, the unemployment rate is 26.5 percent.²

While entrepreneurship and the technology sector have been bright spots in urban Montana, our rural economy has not reaped the benefits: 75 percent of new jobs created since 2000 are located in just five of our 56 counties.³

Montana needs a representative in Congress who understands the challenges facing Montana families, and is committed to creating broad-based opportunity for our state. That means fostering not just jobs, but good jobs with good pay and benefits, and building them all across the state.

Kathleen Williams has a clear record of fostering opportunity and supporting our economy:

- Kathleen started her career as an economist who evaluated the employment effects of development projects. She **started her own business and helped build two non-profit corporations** from the ground up. She managed staff, contracts, fundraising, strategic planning, and program implementation.
- Kathleen is a former three-term state legislator. Elected to the Montana House of Representatives during the Great Recession, Kathleen's home district was beset by the decline of the construction industry in the wake of the housing market collapse. **Over her six years of elected service, one of her top priorities was growing and diversifying Montana's economy.**
- To attract millennials and entrepreneurs to do business in Montana, **Kathleen passed legislation creating a new type of corporation in Montana**⁴, Benefits Corporations, which allow innovative businesses to do good while doing well. Kathleen's bill allows Benefits Corporations to invest in philanthropic work, like using local goods for their products, while earning a profit, while being protected from certain shareholder lawsuits.
- **Kathleen voted to lower the business equipment tax**⁵, in order to foster capital growth and help Montana's agricultural sector. She fought to grow Montana's film industry and to advance research and development opportunities for business.
- Kathleen spearheaded passage of the Montana Food Policy Modernization Act⁶, which **reduced bureaucratic overlap, cut red tape for food businesses, and allowed Montanans to start cottage food companies**, preparing products in a home kitchen. In just three years, this legislation spurred creation of 200 new businesses and 3,000 new Montana products. Many of

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#)

² MSU Extension, "Fort Belknap Reservation," *Montana Poverty Report Card*. August 2017. <http://www.montana.edu/extensionecon/countydata/FortBelknap.pdf>.

³ Missoulian, "[Rural areas left out of Montana's rapid job growth as non-labor income rises](#)," March 25, 2018

⁴ 2015 Montana Legislature, [HB258](#), Rep. Kathleen Williams

⁵ 2013 Montana Legislature, [HB472](#), Rep. Jerry Bennett; [HB332](#), Rep. Mary McNally; [SB96](#); Senator Bruce Tutvedt

⁶ 2015 Montana Legislature, [HB478](#), Rep. Kathleen Williams



these businesses produce value-added products using Montana agricultural inputs. And they span rural and urban Montana including the four corners (Beaverhead, Lincoln, Sheridan, and Carter Counties) of Montana and places in between.

- As Vice Chair of the House Taxation Committee, **Kathleen worked to pass balanced budgets in 2011, 2013, and 2015** and avoid growth-killing tax increases and spending cuts.
- Having worked with farmers and ranchers across the state, and the West, and **servicing on the House Agriculture Committee for three terms**, Kathleen has strong relationships in the agricultural sector and a commitment to the enhanced vitality of our rural communities.

Kathleen knows how to create jobs and opportunities for all Montanans. All Montanans deserve a good job, good benefits, and the opportunity for a secure retirement. They also deserve a chance to get the training and education necessary to be effective and competitive in the 21st-century economy.

In Congress, Kathleen will continue to work with our business communities to identify and remove barriers to business success and foster growth and employment. She will build crucial apprenticeship and job training initiatives, support federal economic development programs, encourage new business development and entrepreneurship, and maintain fair trade practices that allow our state's agricultural industry to thrive. She'll lower healthcare costs, protect our public lands, and help with infrastructure and quality of life projects, to solidify Montana's reputation as a great place to do business.

Ensuring a 21st century workforce

The global economy increasingly demands a workforce that is educated and evolving with new technology and business practices. A U.S. Department of Labor study found that the number one indicator of workers' incomes is "a post-secondary education, particularly a degree or industry-recognized credential related to jobs in demand".⁷

To get a good job, Montanans need a good education. Unfortunately, too many are priced out of four-year universities and don't have sufficient alternatives. In Congress, Kathleen will work with state and local stakeholders to develop a multi-layered public education system. Her top priorities are:

- Keep the cost of college low by protecting federal student financial assistance, holding the Department of Education accountable for stopping predatory lending, protecting funding for key programs - like TRIO - that keep four-year colleges accessible to all, and allowing Americans to refinance federal student loans, just like you can with a mortgage or car loan.
- Support Tribal colleges, which provide opportunities on Montana's Indian Reservations and beyond.
- Work with two-year and community colleges and trade schools to create a compelling alternative to four-year colleges. Many professional trades offer good-paying jobs that only require two years of specialized education. We need to increase their role in training Montana's workforce without saddling students with years of debt.
- Build connections between the private sector and the Montana university system. Gallatin College in Bozeman is a great example of a public institution that works with the private sector to develop a workforce assessment and then tailors its curricula to maximize relevant training for students. Kathleen will help foster more collaborations to create Montana jobs in key sectors like healthcare, energy, and infrastructure.

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, "[What Works in Job Training: A Synthesis of The Evidence](#)," July 22, 2014



- Work with Montana’s employers and unions to expand on-the-job training, registered apprenticeships, and other training programs.⁸ These educational models are popular internationally. They allow students to gain crucial trade skills without incurring debt. And by partnering with Montana’s unions on apprenticeships, we can ensure that those jobs pay well and have good benefits.

Easing the burden of healthcare costs on Montana businesses, encouraging job growth and entrepreneurship

As a former caregiver and a legislator who worked extensively on healthcare, Kathleen understands how a healthcare crisis can impact an individual and a family. That’s why fixing our broken healthcare system is her top priority.⁹

High healthcare costs can also hamstring innovation and entrepreneurship. As the cost of group market plans increase, employers have less of an incentive to offer competitive benefits packages to their employees. The high costs of insurance drive businesses to hire workers as part-time or contractors. Those decisions ripple throughout Montana’s economy: underemployed Montanans need to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet, and the productive relationship between businesses and loyal employees frays.

Innovation also takes a hit. Montanans who are covered by their employer face a major roadblock if they want to start their own businesses: they must sacrifice their employer plan and join the individual market, which is often more expensive and always more uncertain, given short-sighted efforts in Washington to repeal or dismantle the Affordable Care Act. The result is Montanans staying in jobs so they can keep their healthcare, forgoing entrepreneurship and career growth.

By lowering healthcare costs, Kathleen’s plan will help level the economic playing field between large corporations and small start-ups. Montana businesses large and small will benefit.

Attract and retain the best talent in Montana

Montana truly is the last best place. We need to use our advantages to keep Montanans here and attract new talent to move here. Montana needs our member of Congress to work hard to protect the things that make Montana so special.

- From Glacier National Park to the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Montana’s public lands are the envy of the nation. So many people come to Montana for our public lands; our outdoor recreation industry creates \$7.1 billion annually for our economy and has directly generated 71,000 jobs. To continue driving our economy and keeping skilled workers, we need to support common sense protections for wilderness study areas, reauthorized and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and address the maintenance backlog of our parks.¹⁰
- Montana is in dire need of infrastructure repairs.¹¹ In order to keep and attract families, entrepreneurs, and businesses, we need to invest in our schools, roads, bridges, clean water systems, and parks/trails.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Williams for Montana, “[Practical Steps to Quality, Affordable Healthcare for all Montanans](#),” April 10, 2018

¹⁰ Outdoor Industry Association, [Montana](#)

¹¹ American Society of Civil Engineers, 2014 Report Card for Montana’s Infrastructure



- Many of us don't lock our cars or houses; keeping communities safe and housing costs affordable are critical issues that need to be addressed to attract families and keep the ones already here.

Supporting Montana agriculture

Agriculture is part of Montana's heritage. Kathleen believes that Montanans deserve the opportunity to stay on the land, or go back to the land if they choose. As a state legislator, she served three terms on the House Agriculture Committee, and vice-chaired it in 2013. She's spent the last several years working with farmers and ranchers across the West, helping them grow their businesses, improve federal policies and programs, and protecting their land and natural resources.

Our producers depend on market opportunities and stability to export their goods and make a living. With an escalating trade war, countries are invoking tariffs on Montana wheat and beef. Trade partners are looking to other countries for barley. Input costs are rising.

Unfortunately, Congressman Gianforte, along with too many members of both parties, aren't standing up for our farmers and ranchers. Congressman Gianforte had a chance to sign a letter with 107 other members of his caucus, urging caution over the trade war.¹² He didn't sign it.

Montana worked for 50 years to develop a wheat strain attractive to Japan. Many worked for years to open up beef exports to China. Montana's producers deserve a representative who will see that work through and keep our trade markets open.

Congress has abdicated its role in foreign policy, and the world has become less stable as a result. In Congress, Kathleen will stand up to anyone who wants to undermine the market access for which our agricultural sector has worked so hard.

Kathleen will fight for our farms, our ranches, and our rural economies, because every Montanan has a stake in the success of our heartland.

Supporting coordinated marketing and value-added development for Montana's economy

Kathleen is committed to federal funding for economic development, and she will work tirelessly in Congress to make sure it gets back to the people of Montana.

- Kathleen will work with the USDA Rural Utility Service (RUS) and Rural Development (RD), as well as the Small Business Administration (SBA) to encourage the continued success of federal economic and infrastructure development in Montana.
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and BUILD Grants through the Department of Transportation are further examples of federal programs which can play a key role in creating jobs and supporting Montana's economy across all 56 counties.
- When making infrastructure and development policy, Kathleen will make sure that Indian Country has a seat at the table. Kathleen is committed to ensuring Indian Community Development Block Grants (ICDBG) and the Indian Reservation Roads program remain in place and continue to create jobs and opportunities for Montanans who live on reservations.

¹² CNBC, "[107 GOP reps send letter to Trump asking him not to do his tariff plan](#)," March 7, 2018