

Chairman Jent and members of the House State Administration Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment briefly on Senate Bill 98, The Montana Land Information Act.

I concur with and support the bill to establish a governance and funding structure for land information data and applications.

I expect you would wonder why a former governor of your neighboring state of Wyoming might venture an opinion on any matter before the Legislature this session. My interest is based on my personal and elected experience in working with technology and its applications for better decisions, particularly as we set examples for each other to follow in the West.

During my time in office, the Western Governors Association adopted a resolution that recognized the importance of the collection, integration, maintenance and distribution of digital geographic data representing the legal land ownership and other related information for our Western states. Governor Mike Leavitt, who was Utah's governor at the time, and I co-sponsored the resolution that was unanimously adopted by the Western Governors.

Our intent was that WGA states including local governments, tribes, the private sector and the federal government would work together to coordinate efforts, set standards and adopt practices to make the most of our efforts and expenditures on information data and systems. We chose to adopt the resolution as a West-wide approach to showing the rest of the U.S. that we know the value of good records managed through productive technology.

Montana folks have in turn become the West's leaders in following through on that resolution. I've worked over the past two years with several of your Montana folks through the Western Cadastral Forum and the Western GIS Council and taken their recommendations to the Federal Geographic Data Committee for the Geospatial One-Stop data portal. When I have mentioned that the suggestions I bring are from Montana, I have had immediate credibility and acceptance for the issue in question.

From a personal perspective, the funding mechanism in SB 98 creates an opportunity to attract and leverage funding from a variety of other sources, particularly from the federal government. Given the budget challenges facing the Congress this year, the greatest chance for allocation of funds to the states will be given to those who are willing to put up their own money as a match for federal dollars that become available.

Local governments will be the primary beneficiaries of the proposed legislation in SB 98. Any way you look at it, all data is local and the best efforts to use the data will come from the local folks.

Routine work on revenue systems, road and bridge maintenance, parcel ownership, emergency response routing, location of school facilities all are examples of how the land record data can and will be used by the locals. The state and federal agencies then can contribute funds to leverage functions needed at their respective levels for routine activities as well as for planning for asset protection under our Homeland Security activities.

The adoption of SB 98 would send a signal to the other western states that Montana will be far ahead of them in modernizing data collection and record keeping. That will send a chill through those states' policy makers when they realize that they will be losing a competitive edge when it comes to attracting new business activity to their states.

The benefit to private property rights is of equal importance, providing legal and personal assurance that a person's property is secure from dispute.

Thank you for your time and indulgence, Mr. Chairman  
With my best regards,  
Jim Geringer  
Wyoming Governor 1995-2003