

SB353 and SB354 – Senate Natural Resources Committee (2/23/2015)**Jay Skoog, Executive Director**

American Council of Engineering Companies of Montana

The American Council of Engineering Companies of Montana (ACEC-Montana) represents engineering firms throughout the state. Our members are engaged in a wide range of engineering works that propel the Montana's economy, and enhance and safeguard our quality of life. Every day, engineering firms across Montana work with elected officials and government agencies on technical matters to provide support to the decision-making process in order to deliver high quality design services for public infrastructure projects.

Our members strongly support both SB353 and SB354.

As you probably know, the Treasure State Endowment Program was created by Montana's voters with the passage of Legislative Referendum 110 on June 2, 1992 to fund infrastructure projects such as water, sewer, solid waste and bridges. Funded by coal tax revenues, this program has an outstanding record of success and it's safe to say that almost all Montanans have been positively impacted.

In the same vein, we feel the Build Montana proposal takes Montana in exactly the right direction— we should utilize funding sources like the coal tax trust to boost improvements to our local infrastructure and provide good paying jobs. At a time when interest rates are at record lows, taxpayers can get a lot of bang for the buck by putting money into infrastructure right now.

BUILD MONTANA means jobs: 1,000s of Montana jobs in construction, engineering, and related services providing materials, fuel, rentals, lodging, meals, etc. For example, a typical TSEP project has funding leverage of three or four to one. That ratio likely means that Build Montana funds will be matched with other funding sources to produce 3-4 times that amount in engineering and construction.

BUILD MONTANA help those in need: Financial need will likely be one of the highest ranking criteria of the Build Montana program. Many of the projects funded will have a high percentage of low to moderate income families in their community.

BUILD MONTANA funds critical infrastructure: The highest priority for grant application ranking will be for projects that solve urgent and serious public health or safety problems.

BUILD MONTANA means lower fees and taxes: Build Montana funding will help communities maintain affordable water/sewer rates and avoid large tax increases to pay for needed infrastructure.

BUILD MONTANA will fund essential projects: The field of eligible projects is limited, and often these projects are needed to help communities address DEQ and EPA regulatory compliance orders.

BUILD MONTANA boosts long-term economic development: Infrastructure is the foundation of economic development and our quality of life. By ignoring our leaking pipes, failing wastewater systems, aged schools, and unsafe bridges we are discouraging economic growth.

Communities across Montana need the Build Montana to help them afford projects that are critical to public health and safety.

Accordingly, we strongly urge your support of these bills, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.