

August 13, 2020

To: Legislative Council

From: Marilyn Miller
Secretary of the Senate

Re: Legislative Snack Bar

When it came to our attention in January 2020 that there would no longer be a cafeteria in the Capitol basement, we began to search for a way to open the third floor snack bar during legislative sessions. In discussions with Steve Baiamonte, General Services Division Administrator, he confirmed that there would no longer be a cafeteria in the basement and requested that the Senate take on responsibility for the snack bar.

The following is a draft plan for ensuring that there will be a snack bar available for legislators and staff in January 2021. We are now submitting it to the Council for your information/approval/disapproval. Nothing has gone beyond discussion stages, but the plan will ensure that legislators can find a bite to eat without leaving the building.

Background

Providing food for legislators during legislative sessions has always been problematic. Under their state contract, managers of the basement cafeteria have been responsible to have food available whenever the legislature is in the building. The question has never been the food or the cafeteria management's desire to provide the service

The issue has always been that the legislature's hours are spread, sometimes thinly, over a long day. No one has ever met that requirement totally because it is difficult to pay staff members' wages for times when they may be selling one or two ice cream bars an hour. It is easy for these managers to reassign snack bar staff to fill in at busy times in the basement or to send them home when they decide it isn't busy enough to warrant remaining open.

During the 2017 session the Senate hired a staff member who was assigned to the cafeteria manager as snack bar staff. It worked very well that session, but our offer was not accepted for the 2019 session. During the last session the staff at the snack bar was very diligent in their efforts to provide the snack bar services; however, the cafeteria manager still set their hours, and the snack bar was not always open when services were required.

Our Goal

Our goal will be to provide an open snack bar from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays (or later during longer sessions) and from 7:00 a.m. to one half hour after the last chamber's adjournment on Saturday. When we know ahead of time that Saturday's sessions will be short, coffee and muffins will be available. We will also order food dependent on the availability of lunch in the rotunda.

The Staff

The Senate will hire two aides; they will be paid out of Senate funds and will work under the supervision of the Secretary of the Senate or designee. They will work staggered hours in order to provide extra coverage during the noon hour, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. One staff member will work Saturday and will provide food dependent upon the schedules of the House and Senate on Saturday.

Since these staffers will be state employees who are paid for their time, we would like to dispense with tipping. Instead, if people would like to leave a gratuity, we would like it to go into a fund for Jack Racicot, a 2019 Senate staff member who is still paralyzed and in great need of help.

The Menu

I am attaching a draft menu for the snack bar. We have received a proposal from 1889 Coffee, and we will charge customers just our cost of individual items. We have searched menus from other food establishments in Helena, and 1889 seems to be the place where we can get every food item listed on the menu at a reduced cost.

The staff will cook hot dogs and popcorn and will heat and serve soup. We will also provide snack items and drinks. We will increase the price of snack items to pay for condiments, janitorial service, paper items, etc.

As the COVID situation currently exists, the menu items would be appropriate. Should there be a change in COVID requirements, we could discontinue items like soup, hot dogs and popcorn.

Handling of Food Items

The Lewis & Clark County Health Department has inspected the space via FaceTime. They informed us about changes that had to be made and how to purchase a 2021 food license. They also provided information on necessary staff in-service on food handling and will make one more onsite inspection before we begin on the 2nd of January.

Equipment

Besides small equipment already on site, the Department of Administration will allow us to use Health Department-required equipment from the basement cafeteria: commercial refrigerator, dishwasher and a washer/dryer.

Tristate Restaurant Supply in Kalispell will provide a latte machine, and supplies for the machine will be purchased from that company. We are also considering buying our regular coffee supplies from them. The snack bar staff will provide coffee to offices and committees, relieving pages of this chore.

Some equipment will have to be purchased: a hot dog griller, a popcorn machine, two soup heat/hold warmers, and muffin/doughnut dispensers. The equipment will be purchased by the Senate.

Financial Issues

We will pay 1889 Coffee weekly directly from their invoices. We are still working on other financial issues, such as credit/debit use, a charge system, and handling cash transactions according to state rules

We hope this project will produce a long-term solution for the third floor snack bar. If members of the Council or other legislators have questions, concerns or suggestions, we would like to hear them. Contact Marilyn Miller at mmiller2@mt.gov or 406-459-8480.