



## Montana State Legislature

August 10, 2022

### OP-ED FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

During the 2021 Legislature, we set a budget to adequately fund state government operations. It turns out that the State Treasury received a lot more tax revenue than we projected. In almost every area, tax receipts have exceeded our expectations. The cause of that can be debated, but it does not change the fact the state is sitting on an estimated \$1.5 **Billion** cash surplus. That surplus is in addition to over \$800 million in rainy day funds. This leaves your elected leaders with a very important decision: should the surplus go back to the taxpayers now or should the state government keep it on hand to spend it as the government sees fit?

We are calling for a Special Session of the Legislature in September to give \$900 million in rebates to taxpayers and pay off \$100 million of the State's existing debt. The Democrat's legislative leaders agree that we have a billion-dollar surplus, but, predictably, they have proposed that the Legislature and the Governor use \$750 million for new government spending.

So, you might hear different narratives on how to handle such a large surplus, but no matter how anyone spins it, the question is still the same: do you get your money back or does the government get to keep it to expand government programs? When you hear anyone say "wait until the Legislature meets in January to decide what to do with the surplus", understand that is code for "we want to use the surplus to start new government programs".

We are of the same mindset as the Governor in his Comeback Plan, which states, "Just because state government brings in more money, it doesn't mean it has to spend it; it's the money you have earned that you are sending to Helena". In following the spirit of the Governor's Comeback Plan, we favor returning \$900 million in rebates to taxpayers in 2022 before the Legislature meets in 2023 and spends the surplus on more government programs. Even after returning \$900 million to taxpayers, the state will still have \$500 million in surplus funds and another \$800 million in rainy day funds. This is more than enough to meet any contingencies that may arise in the 2023 session.

We believe a very short, one-issue special session would be the best and the fastest way to get *your* money, earned *by you, back to you*. This is your state government and your voice is instrumental to our decisions. We encourage you to reach out to your legislators - - Republicans and Democrats - - and urge that we meet in a Special Session this fall and return \$900 million to the taxpayers.

Rep. Bill Mercer  
Billings

Sen. Greg Hertz  
Polson

Rep. Matt Regier  
Kalispell

Sen. Dan Bartel  
Lewistown