



Questionnaire for Billings 2025 City Council Election.

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The members of the Billings Firefighters Union, IAFF Local 521, are committed to protecting the lives, property, and well-being of our community. As we consider endorsements for the upcoming city council election, we are seeking your positions on issues that directly affect public safety, emergency response, firefighter health and wellness, and the future of Billings.

Please respond to the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Your answers will help our membership make informed decisions about who will best support the citizens of Billings and the men and women who serve them.

1. Please provide a brief bio.

For more information, my website is www.denispitman.com

I was born October 17, 1965 in Butte Montana. In 1970 my family moved to Billings where I grew up at the corner of Dogwood and Cheryl Street. I graduated from Billings Senior High in 1984. I have a BA, Assoc. of Applied Science in Mortuary Science, 2 years of graduate studies in Theology. I have been married to Paula for 32 years, and have 7 children and 3 grandchildren.

2. What made you want to run for city council?

Having served on the council for 2 terms, and then one term as Yellowstone County Commissioner, my desire to get back in and get our city back on the right track is important to me. Currently I see too much division, and rather than working together, I have seen an adversarial relationship between administration and public safety. I hope to bring a level of civility and partnership back to the council.

3. What is your leadership style and how do you intend to bring a consensus to the council?

Bringing a level of civility and understanding of what each department does is important, I was stunned the first time I served that no member of the council had ever toured any departments before. I would encourage every member of the council, especially any new members to go to each department and see what they do on a daily basis. One of the first things the fire department did was gear me up and send me into the old burn training building. It showed me an aspect to your duties that I could never have understood otherwise. I have worked closely with all the fire chiefs as the County Fire Chief during my time as a commissioner. I understand your needs and your relationships. Lets get back to working together, and keeping all of the residents safe. Another thing that I will bring to the council is an understanding of what you face every day, and it is so much more than fire fighting. First on the scene, medical issues, mental issues, all are just another day in the life of the fire department. Now we have to be aware of safety from unstable people and events like what happened in Anaconda this year. Your safety is my priority.

4. What do you see as the role and/or function of city government?

We are the governing board, and set policy. It is our job to make sure that the city we oversee is being managed. We don't need to just cut every budget evenly just to be fair, priority based budgeting means we look at the dollars we have and how the public wants those dollars allocated. Public safety has been the number one priority for as long as I have been in public service and will continue to be my priority.

5. What is the number one issue facing Billings for the next city council, and how do you intend to address it?

It is hard to believe, but it seems like déjà vu from the first time I ran, and council were looking to balance the budget by cutting police and fire. We can't do that, and I won't do that. Priority based budgeting, and working with the fire council will be important to me. I don't know that most of the city council even know there is a fire council to be honest... Our call volume keeps going up, and the situations we are placing you in continue to become more complicated. We need to make sure you all are safe and have the resources you need.

6. How would you determine and consider the agendas of other council members to be the most productive and prioritize the conflicting demands of Billings?

Again, priority based budgeting, and also taking more control of the budget so that the city administration does not move money around as easily after we have set a budget. We need to have a clear message by the way we set the budget and expect it to be carried forward.

7. How would you work with other entities to balance asks of the public for funding through levies and bonds?

We have to be more aggressive with the legislature, and this past session the city was not present to protect our needs and issues to the level I thought they should have. We

have our levies and have finally opened a second fire station in the Heights. We need to make sure that they are fully staffed and provided the necessary equipment and training needed to provide the services you are required to perform each day.

8. What do you see as the role of the Union in representing the 144 members of Local 521?

Your job is a voice of all the staff. Since the charter actually prevents me from going to individual employees, I need to hear from you on a regular basis what you need and why you need it. It is also your responsibility to get the best compensation for your members. That being said, you also see the issues facing our budget. Coming to the council with reasonable and fair requests allow us to work together rather than against each other. You also see the other departments and what they are facing. Unlike some unions, you see everything just like we do as far as budgeting. Let me know how we make this work better for everyone. We all have the interest of the people of Billings and Yellowstone County in mind as we try to provide services to everyone.

9. Currently Fire Station 5 is undergoing a renovation that is long overdue. There are four other stations that need considerable renovations and a growing need for a new station to support growth. What is your stance on maintaining what is currently in use versus building new stations?

This has always been my frustration, and was exacerbated when I became a commissioner and found so much deferred maintenance. We can not balance budgets by kicking the can down the road. We need to get our current stations up to necessary levels, and continually evaluate the needs of our community as it grows. With all our first responders, we can't keep acting like Billings hasn't grown significantly over the past decade. It is also important that the citizens understand that if we don't keep our level of service up, we lose our fire rating and that will effectively raise their insurance premium, so one way or another we will be writing a check, do we want it to be to insurance companies or to the people providing the services?

10. The men and women of Local 521 currently respond to about 18,000 to 20,000 calls for service each year. Departments throughout the nation that respond to a similar number of calls have between 200 and 250 members taking those calls. Currently Local 521 has 144 members. What do you see as solutions to add staffing?

I believe we have to be honest with everyone. Firefighters have become first responders with requirements that exceed just "putting out fires". Each day we ask you to be everything from firefighters to EMT, traffic control and natural disaster responders. Each time that bell rings, and you put on your gear we are asking you to have training in unbelievable areas. Medical, to mechanical, and then add in the mental illness that is in our community, and it is almost overwhelming. We need to find ways to provide you with the resources you need, and that requires communication. You need to let me know what you need and why so that we can work together to get this done. At some point we need specialized teams that are more able to respond to all the non

fire related situations you face each day. I always refer to the fact that I grew up watching EMERGENY and Squad 51. I think they were as need back then as they are now.

11. Firefighters face significant risks from cancer, PTSD, and other occupational hazards. How would you support initiatives to improve firefighter health and wellness programs?
This is something I need you to educate me about. What do you need, and how can we provide it? Working with DES, I understand there have been many missed opportunities to get state and federal funding that could have helped in this area. It also could have provided money that could have been used for equipment and training. We need to look at all of this and start being more aggressive in applying for necessary equipment and follow up needs of our staff. We face situations that now also involve PTSD, chemical and drug exposure, and so much more that we need to be making sure that the people and especially the council understand.
12. How will you approach contract negotiations with Local 521 if elected to city council?
I will ask to be part of the negation team, and be at the table. I will promote an attitude that we need to work together not against each other. Hopefully we can mend some of the distrust that has happened in the past from both sides and come to the table with honest and realistic requests and vision for the future.
13. How would you support community risk reduction initiatives such as fire prevention education, wildfire preparedness, and public health partnerships?
Ultimately, that is one of the things that most elected officials can do and for some reason don't. I have always used my position to promote all of this and more, and communicate that to the people in any situation I am in. I also use my social media presence to promote what we are doing, and what people need to know. Our emergency information system needs to be used more effectively to communicate with the community both in times of emergency and in educational events happening.

Thank you for your continued support, and I hope that I have shown in the past an ability to help in anyway I can. My time on the council, and my experience in the county have truly been educational and professional. I hope we have a chance to work together, and I look forward to touring all of your stations, and visiting with you as we go forward. I would be honored to have your support and endorsement.

Thank you,

Denis Pitman
Ward 2 candidate

Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses. Your answers will be shared with our membership as we consider our endorsement. Please return your completed questionnaire to Local 521 by September 1st, 2025 at 5p.m.