

Questionnaire for Billings 2025 Mayoral election.

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 mayoral 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.

I was raised and educated in Billings. I graduated from Eastern Montana College (now MSU-B) with a B.S. in Business Administration and I am 1st lieutenant veteran of the US Air Force. I had careers as a Yellowstone County Deputy Sheriff for nine years and a banker for 27 years. I have served in many volunteer positions for both the City of Billings and Yellowstone County.

1. What made you want to run for mayor?

I want to be the mayor of Billings to continue serving my city at the next level. I am currently a City Council member, representing Ward 5, and the Deputy Mayor. With my 5+ years on the Council I understand how the city works - its management structure, departments, operations, budgeting, etc. I have the knowledge and experience to serve as the mayor on day one.

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

My leadership style is bringing people together. I proved this by being elected Deputy Mayor twice by City Councils. Although the Mayor and City Council races are non-partisan, the people serving in these positions bring their values and priorities into their decision-making. I listen carefully to my fellow council members to find common ground and I am willing to give and take for the betterment of Billings and its citizens.

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

The role of the city council is to set policy for the city staff to implement. Ensuring the safety of citizens, which includes police, fire department and code enforcement departments, is a primary function. Other essential services include water, sanitation, waste management, public transportation, and road maintenance. Recreational facilities are also important for a dynamic community; however, this has declined due to the realities of the budget issues and the public safety priorities we are facing currently.

City government is also responsible for planning and regulating land use. It enforces zoning laws that dictate where certain activities (residential, commercial, industrial) can take place, and how properties should be developed to maintain the city’s growth in an orderly and sustainable manner.

1. What is the number one issue for the next mayor, and how do you intend to address it?

The number one issue facing Billings is its ability to fund essential services, especially our police and fire departments, and minimize the negative impact on other services funded through the General Fund, including parks, planning, and administration. Due to a recent decision by the 2025 State Legislature, the city’s ability to assess mills against taxpayers’ property has been reduced. Our 2026 budget cannot exceed the 2025 rates which will result in a revenue decrease of over $2 million in the General Fund.

I have been working with the City Administrator and Finance Director to develop a thorough understanding of options available to address this issue. One option is to change the City Charter to remove the mill levy cap so that the General Fund can increase appropriately, most likely through additional taxes. This change requires approval by the voters, and it could be presented to them in 2026. I have the knowledge and the negotiating skills to lead the city council as we continue our discussions to develop a course of action.

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

I will meet with each council member individually to get to know them and understand their values, priorities, concerns, and political pressures. I will work to find areas where members’ goals overlap, such as fiscal responsibility, improving quality of life, or attracting investment.

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

First, I would assess community needs and economic capacity based on an analysis of available data. Then I would develop clear communication channels with the public, explaining the purpose, benefit, and impact of each proposed funding measure. I would also promote public input sessions so residents can weigh in on priorities and better understand the issues and trade-offs involved. At the same time, I would work with other entities to show coordination and a unified commitment to fiscal responsibility.

I believe this approach increases the likelihood of public support and ensures that funding measures are responsible, equitable, and aligned with broader community needs.

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

I believe the Union’s first and most important role is to listen to its members. Union leadership must understand what its members want and need to effectively advocate for their rights and ensure their fair treatment. Then the Union can more successfully fulfill its functions for collective bargaining, securing benefits for workers, and fostering solidarity among employees.

1. 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?

While I understand the need for new stations to support growth in the Westend and the Heights, I believe maintaining what is currently in use is the more financially prudent option right now and realistically the only option given the city’s budget situation. Until the issue described in #5 above is resolved, the city’s budget is short, over $2 million in 2026. This doesn’t even consider increases in the General Fund budget that had been planned for prior to the State Legislature’s actions.

1. 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 L521 has 144 members. What do you see as solutions to add staffing?

The lack of staff led to significant overtime costs for the BFD. However, with the citizens’ approval of the Safety Mill Levy in 2023, the department is in a less precarious position than many other city departments. The city council looks to the Fire Chief’s proposed budget which could include additional staffing.

See #5 again. The source of funds for staffing the Fire Department comes from the General Fund. Citizens will have to vote to increase funds either through another mill levy or by elimination of the charter cap of the number of mills levied.

1. Firefighters face significant risks from cancer, PTSD, and other occupational hazards. How would you support initiatives to improve firefighter health and wellness programs?

I will and do support initiatives to improve firefighter health and wellness programs that are critical to ensuring that first responders are physically and mentally prepared for the challenges they face. Mental Health Programs, Decontamination Protocols, Mandatory Physical Fitness Training and Health Education are all important.

1. How will you approach contract negotiations with Local 521 if elected mayor?

The city charter dictates how the city will approach negotiations. As a policy-making body, the city council is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the city. City staff negotiate all contracts with city departments. Each contract is presented to city council for a vote to either approve or deny it.

As a current council member, I have carefully reviewed the contracts to assess their fairness and equity for the city and the firefighters prior to casting my vote. I will continue to do the same as Mayor.

1. How would you support community risk reduction initiatives such as fire prevention education, wildfire preparedness, and public health partnerships?

I am always in favor of initiatives that include the community in being part of the solution. The mayor and council depends on department heads to bring information to the council for discussion.

I would support various activities including regular educational events, open houses, and school visits to teach fire safety practices, such as smoke alarm use, escape planning, and kitchen safety. I would also encourage relationships with the county’s Department of Emergency Services and RiverStone Health. I believe that initiatives should start with the fire department itself, then to the city council and then with its citizens.

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.