Project: Montana International Competitiveness Initiative

Brief Description: Montana State University Billings requests $500,000 for development of strategies and solutions to provide Montana business leaders, lawmakers and others the tools necessary successfully pursue business opportunities on a global scale. Through the Montana International Competitiveness Initiative and a statewide International Business Conference, Montana employers and entrepreneurs will be in a position to more adequately compete on the international stage.

Executive Summary: Montana's economic growth is stable, but there is incredible opportunity for Montana business entrepreneurs to succeed in a global marketplace. To help these companies expand their businesses, it is critical to provide them with current information related to the international business arena and to assure them an adequately prepared workforce.

The MSU Billings College of Business held its first International Business Conference in April 2002. More than 600 students, faculty, business leaders, and government resource providers participated. Another successful conference was held in February 2003, with similar attendance. These have been the most successful International Business Conferences ever held in Montana. Follow-up evaluations have been positive and have noted the need to continue this event on a regular basis. With renewed emphasis on the rise of China and other Asian countries in the world economy and the need for Montanans to be more competitive on the international stage, it is time to continue this project in Billings, Montana's business hub.

Project Description: The International Competitive Initiative through a new International Business Conference will draw experts in exporting and foreign trade from throughout Montana, the nation and the globe. It will allow Montana business owners to have direct contact with key international trade authorities. In addition, conference participants have included regional and national leaders in agriculture, technology and business, as well as member of the Montana congressional delegation, and the office of Montana's governor.

Outcomes from the original conferences have included renewed awareness of Montana's place in a highly competitive global environment as well as expansion of Montana businesses into international markets. Funds from this appropriation will be used to develop and maintain a Web site to electronically publish the resource guide. This will help provide easy access to information, direction and guidance for businesses in Montana engaged in or seeking information about exporting their products. The Web site will also include direct links to other resources such as the Big Sky Economic Development Authority and the Montana Department of Commerce's Office of Trade and International Relations among others. The appropriation will also be used to help offset other expenses related to the conference in order to keep the conference affordable for participants. Other expenses are related to operational costs, conference coordination, speaker travel, and promotion of the event.

Congressional Action Needed: An appropriation of $500,000 is requested.

Importance to Montana: The Montana International Competitiveness Initiative provides valuable information and expertise to business entrepreneurs in Montana who are interested in learning how to grow their business enterprise by expanding into a global economy. In addition, international experts are being brought to MSU Billings exposing Montana business entrepreneurs to the expectations and needs of the international business world. The intended result is a growing and prospering Montana economy reflecting substantial international business partnerships and agreements.

Contact at MSU Billings:
Ron Sexton, Chancellor (406) 657-2300
Dan Carter, Director, Government Relations (406) 657-2269
Dr. Gary Young, Dean, College of Business (406) 657-2326