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**CONTACT:** Sarah Lawlor  
Montana Department of Commerce  
Montana Office of Tourism  
406-841-2893

Marissa Kozel  
Communications Director  
Montana Department of Commerce  
406-841-2772

## **Montana Department of Commerce Provides Funds to Assist Billings in Aftermath of Tornado**

(HELENA) – The Montana Department of Commerce is providing \$20,000 in emergency contingency funds to assist the Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau in the aftermath of the tornado that struck the city, June 20, 2010.

The funds, which are allocated through the Montana Office of Tourism for marketing purposes, are to assist communities whose tourism industry is adversely impacted by an unforeseen emergency, such as a natural disaster.

“Billings is a vital component of Montana’s successful tourism industry. It is essential we provide assistance,” said Anthony Preite, Director of the Montana Department of Commerce. “The severity of the destruction at the onset of Billings’ busiest travel season and the wide national media exposure make this a high priority. Through these funds, we hope to mitigate the loss of business and travel revenue and help spread the message that Billings is indeed, ‘open for business’.”

“Billings has really pulled together over the last week to address the significant impacts this event is having on the business and travel industry,” said John Brewer, President/CEO of the Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention & Visitors Bureau. “This grant will help us retain business and propel our important outreach efforts, by letting regional and national meeting planners know Billings is still their destination of choice.”

In 2009, Billings collected over \$2 million in lodging tax revenue. As Montana’s largest city, they are a major contributor of bed tax revenue for the state and they serve as Montana’s principal convention and event city. In addition, Billings is a starting point for

travelers to the Little Bighorn Battlefield, Yellowstone National Park and a myriad of smaller communities surrounding the city. Assuring the success of Billings' tourism industry helps secure the economic health of Montana's communities both large and small.

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