

## H.B. 2 BOOSTS FUNDING FOR PRIVATE JOBS

### ON HIGHWAY REPAIRS BY CONTRACTORS

Infrastructure jobs through highway repair and construction are slated to receive \$30 million in funding the next two years per line items in House Bill 2. The funding is triple what has been granted in recent years, and it is badly needed after a winter that was particularly destructive for potholes, breakups and frost heaves.

Those jobs will be spread all across Montana through private contractors doing repaving, surfacing and bridge repairs, according to Rep. Duane Ankney, R-Colstrip, who chaired the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Natural Resources and Transportation. Ankney's committee granted the extra funding at the request of MDOT Director Jim Lynch, and it remained in place as House Bill 2 progressed through the full House Appropriations Committee, the voting on the floor of the House, committee hearings in the Senate, and finally March 28, approval on the floor of the Senate.

"Well, what would you expect," Ankney said wryly. "This funding just makes good common sense. It is probably the best jobs bill coming out of this place right now, and we are talking about good paying jobs through the private sector. Those dollars will move through grocery stores and gas stations. They will be tips for waitresses and snow tires for pickups. Besides all that we get a smooth ride down the highway. Maybe even an old guy like me can keep my Harley on two wheels."

Ankney, a down to earth coal miner at his day job, frequently reminds other House members about the need for legislation that will "provide a check on the table for groceries, school clothes for the kids and shoes for the baby."

Lynch, who formerly operated a large highway construction business before taking over this huge state agency, promised the construction money would start rolling across Montana soon after the 62<sup>nd</sup> Legislature wraps up the session. He told the subcommittee during presentations in January that his department was already drawing up plans for projects.

"Members of my association are delighted with this news," smiled Cary Hegreberg, director of the Montana Contractors Association. "We all realize that nothing is a done deal until the final day of the session and the governor signs his name to the deal. However, I have been around this place a long time, and everybody realizes this is really needed by highway travellers as well as the private working people. Ankney and his committee not only targeted this gas tax money for good use, but I saw them protect it as H.B. 2 went through the process." Hegreberg and MCA members had encouraged the funding all session.

Ankney emphasized that common sense prevailed throughout his committee which worked together on a bipartisan basis. "All six of us came to this decision after a lot of discussion. Give credit to Sen. Rick Ripley, vice chair and R-Choteau, Sen. John Brendan R-Scobey, Sen. Jim Keane D-Butte, Rep. Galen Hollenbaugh, D-Helena, and Rep. Mike Cuffe, R-Eureka. We wrestled this stuff over together, and each

one of us listened to everyone else. Like Brendan said, we might vote 5-1 on something, but the one negative vote will back up the position of the committee when all is said and done.”

Rep. Ankney has a list of projects that are planned. They included: