

# Facebook Disputes Claims of Gianforte

Gubernatorial candidate asserted that Facebook passed over Montana for a data center

BY BOBBY CAINA CALVAN, ASSOCIATED PRESS // APR 21, 2016 // [LATEST](#)



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HELENA — In a recent campaign speech, gubernatorial candidate Greg Gianforte asserted that Facebook passed over Montana for a data center because of the state's business equipment tax.

However, a spokesman for the internet giant said Thursday that Facebook executives never spoke

to the Bozeman Republican.

Gianforte made his claims at a news conference at a Clancy lumberyard on Monday, when he unveiled a tax-relief proposal. He said he had discussions with Facebook and others about building data centers in Montana.



He went on to say: “You know what the biggest barrier was? The business equipment tax.”

Facebook spokesman Andy Stone on Thursday said no discussions with Gianforte took place and the tax was

not the reason the company didn’t locate the center in Montana.

Gianforte stood by his comments in an interview on Thursday, saying he spoke with a Facebook executive last year. That same executive, Gianforte said, appeared on a radio show last year hosted by Aaron Flint, now the spokesman for the Gianforte campaign.

Facebook said Flint’s guest was a low-level former employee who had no direct involvement in data center planning or operations. Facebook also said the employee left the company about a year ago.

Flint’s guest, Dean Roberts, said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday night that he was not speaking on behalf of Facebook on the radio program or when he later spoke with Gianforte.

His employment status with Facebook at the time of his on-air chat with Flint and his conversation with Gianforte could not be verified. He said a nondisclosure agreement with the company prevented him from providing details.

Roberts denied telling Gianforte that Facebook's reason for not pursuing a data center in Montana was because of the business equipment tax.

"I would have been under no official capacity to comment on that on behalf of Facebook. ... Nor was I ever authorized to do that," Roberts said.

Roberts said he had no role in the company's site-selection process.

In a statement emailed to The AP, Facebook said it will continue to consider Montana, as well as other states, for future data operations.

"As a growing company, we are constantly looking at sites around the world that may be conducive to data center operations," Stone said, citing renewable energy, an educated workforce and an open, nondiscriminatory environment as criteria.

Facebook has three existing data centers with a fourth being built, the company said.

The office of Gov. Steve Bullock said he first pitched Montana as a potential site for a Facebook data center in 2013, after meeting the company's chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, at the Montana Economic Development Summit.

Gianforte, a Bozeman businessman who founded RightNow

Technologies and turned it into a global enterprise, has made the economy a centerpiece of his bid to deny Bullock a second term.

If elected governor, Gianforte said he would phase out the business equipment tax over four years as part of what he called his “406 Tax Relief” proposal.

The tax generates about \$81 million in state revenue annually.

The equipment levy was last adjusted in 2013, when the rate was cut from 2 percent to 1.5 percent and the minimum purchases that trigger the tax raised from \$20,000 to \$100,000.

His tax plan would also hold the line on government spending and lower the maximum income tax rate from 6.9 percent to 6 percent.