



April 2, 2007

Friends and neighbors...

It's the first week of April and we're now just three weeks away from the end of the 2007 Legislative Session. Today is the last day for the Senate to hear House bills and vice versa. Tomorrow we start spending the bulk of our time voting on the Senate floor, which means we're in for some long days (and long nights)! *I'm hopeful that I'll soon be able to spend more time back in our community, working more directly on the issues that you care about.*

Thanks for taking the time to read my weekly e-mail update. In this issue, I'll be asking you for feedback and I'd appreciate it if you could send me a reply e-mail with your answers. How you feel about the issues is very important to me, so if you have any questions, comments or concerns, please contact me at Carrell.Mike@leg.wa.gov, and as always, feel free to drop by my office if you're ever in Olympia.

Policy vs. Politics: The death and rebirth of SB 5070

As you know, I have been working very hard this session to bring about comprehensive prison and supervision reform with my bill, Senate Bill 5070. We hit a milestone when SB 5070 passed the Senate 48-1, which told me that nearly every senator agreed with the proposal to overhaul our state's corrections system. Then the bill moved to the House of Representatives, where it unfortunately didn't get as positive a reception.

By the time my bill moved across the Capitol Rotunda into the other chamber, there was already talk of its demise. Some said it didn't go far enough. Others said it went too far. *Rumors started coming in as early as last Friday that the bill wasn't even going to be voted out of committee.*

By Wednesday, the bill was considered essentially dead three times, as House members told me personally that they weren't going to hear it in its present form. I had to keep fighting and resuscitating the bill again and again. I went to many different key players in the House to work out a compromise that would address everyone's concerns.

Finally, as the bill's vital signs were waning, an eclectic group of people pulled together to support it. **We went to both Republicans and Democrats who had concerns, and had to convince them that my bill was not only the right thing to do, but the best thing to do.** I personally worked with House Leadership to get changes in the bill.

During all of this, the Tacoma News Tribune wrote an editorial urging the House folks not to play politics with this very important issue. Also, the New York Times ran an editorial touting the provisions in my bill as being a **possible model for the nation's correctional system.** And Wednesday, Tacoma Senator Debbie Regala and I were on TVW's Inside Olympia program for an hour, detailing the provisions laid out in SB 5070, so the timing was good.

I worked very hard with the House Republican Caucus, whose members seemed to have the most concerns. Originally, they had intended to propose 29 amendments to my bill, but through our discussions I was able to bring that down to nine. The Chair of the House Human Services Committee, Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, introduced a striking amendment that I was pleased with, as it still kept the main intent of the bill and kept it moving forward through the process. The House Democrats on the committee accepted three of the Republican amendments, before passing SB 5070.

The bill also made it out of the House Appropriations Committee with no amendments or changes, but there are still those with some concerns about the bill that I think need to be addressed. **That's why I wanted to ask you some questions about what you think the bill should do in the realm of incarceration and community supervision.**

To begin with, **how do you feel about the restoration of rights to felons?** Currently, a felon who is released to community supervision is not given back their right to vote until they have made full and complete restitution of their legal financial obligations, or LFOs. The problem is many offenders will never be able to complete their restitution, and therefore never gain back their rights. **Do you think it should stay this way?** Some feel that released felons should be given their rights back immediately. One idea, which I like to call a "trust but verify" system, is to give felons back their voting rights **PROVISIONALLY**, however if they fail to make their restitution payments three times in a year, **those rights would be immediately revoked** and then the felon must make 24 consecutive monthly payments before those rights are again restored. Under this plan, for the first time the state will be able to track the identity and location of offenders in a database. If an offender chooses not to do the right thing by paying back their victims, **those rights will be terminated** and the database information will be immediately updated, effectively preventing them from trying to vote illegally. **What are your thoughts about this issue?**

I also want to know **how you feel about temporary housing for the most dangerous offenders coming out of prison.** The reason I ask this is because for years, the Department of Corrections has been transitioning offenders into communities without having the actual authority to do so. Offenders would stay in these homes for up to three months under stabilized supervision before being released. Do you think these dangerous offenders should be monitored in transitional housing after being released from prison, or simply let out onto the streets?

Thirdly, I'm interested in knowing how you feel about offering **educational opportunities to offenders while they're behind bars.** Studies have shown that the most effective method to keep an offender from recidivating (committing new crimes) is education and job skills. One option being considered is to allow offenders to receive up to college-level training and education, provided that the offender pays for it themselves or it is paid for by a third party, like a parent or grandparent. **How do you feel about that?**

I'm spending a lot of time trying to find a better way to deal with felons returning to our community to make our neighborhoods safer and reduce the costs to taxpayers and local governments.

In Closing

Thanks again for taking the time to read my e-mail update. Please write or e-mail me your responses to my questions above, and any other comments, questions or concerns you might have. I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say. You can reach me using the information below.

- Office address:
**109A Irv Newhouse Building
P.O. Box 40428
Olympia, WA 98504-0428**
- Office phone number: **(360) 786-7395**
- Home phone number: **(253) 581-2859**
- E-mail address: Carrell.Mike@leg.wa.gov

Sincerely,



Mike Carrell
28th District State Senator