



Bob McCaslin

Washington State Senator • 4th Legislative District



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Committees

- Judiciary (Ranking Minority Member)
- Economic Development Trade & Innovation
- Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee
- Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs

2009 Mid-Session Update

March 24, 2009

Dear Friends,

It's a privilege to return to the Washington State Senate and continue serving you in this fine institution. We are more than halfway through the 2009 legislative session, and now is a good time to give you an update on our progress.

The Democrat-controlled Senate has addressed a number of issues – some legitimate and some frivolous. We have taken votes on everything from circumventing the Electoral College to expanding civil unions.

The pink – let's say – donkey in the room is the budget. Years of irresponsible government overspending has resulted in our state facing a budget deficit of more than \$9 billion. I am disappointed that, at this point, the majority party has yet to offer any ideas as to how to address this problem in a substantial way.

There are even some in Olympia who want to raise your taxes. Many of you are struggling, and you want to know why government can't live within its means like your family has to do.

The answer is we can... if we choose to. New and higher taxes are not the answer. Prioritizing and controlling Olympia's runaway spending is. We have a spending problem, not a revenue problem.

The following insert will provide you with a look at some of the major issues legislators have dealt with so far this session, and explain how we can solve the budget deficit without taking more money from your wallet or making extreme cuts to vital services.

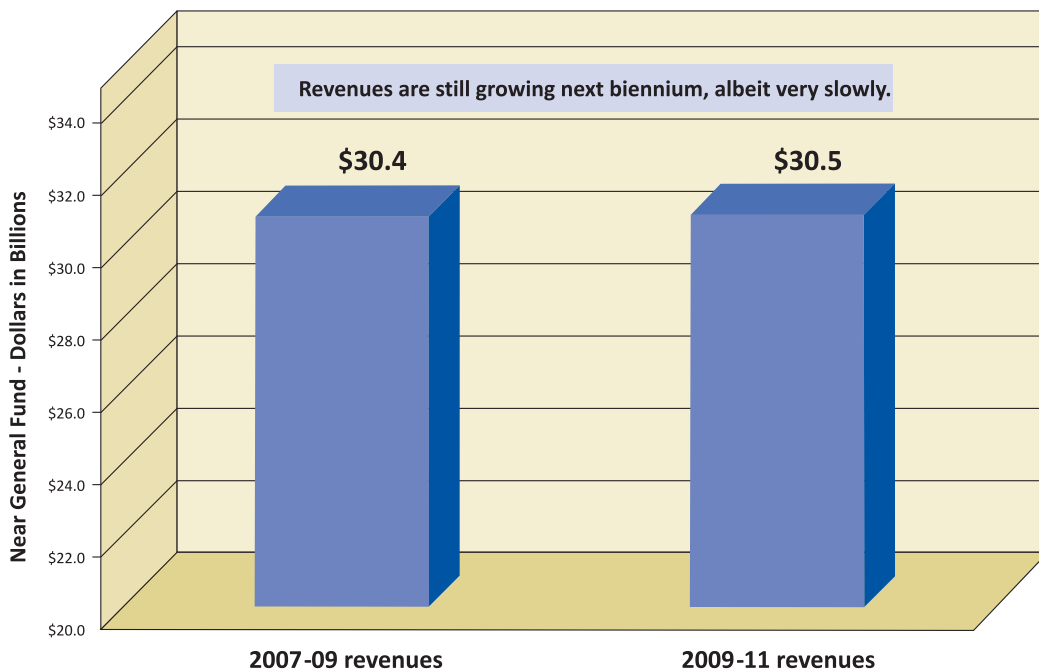
Sen. Bob McCaslin
4th District

Balance the state budget without tax increases? Yes, we can!

- Without decimating taxpayer-funded services for the most vulnerable
- Without huge layoffs of service providers
- Without undermining public education

Olympia does not have a revenue shortage: State government expects to collect **slightly more revenue (\$66 million)** in 2009-11 than it has in 2007-09.

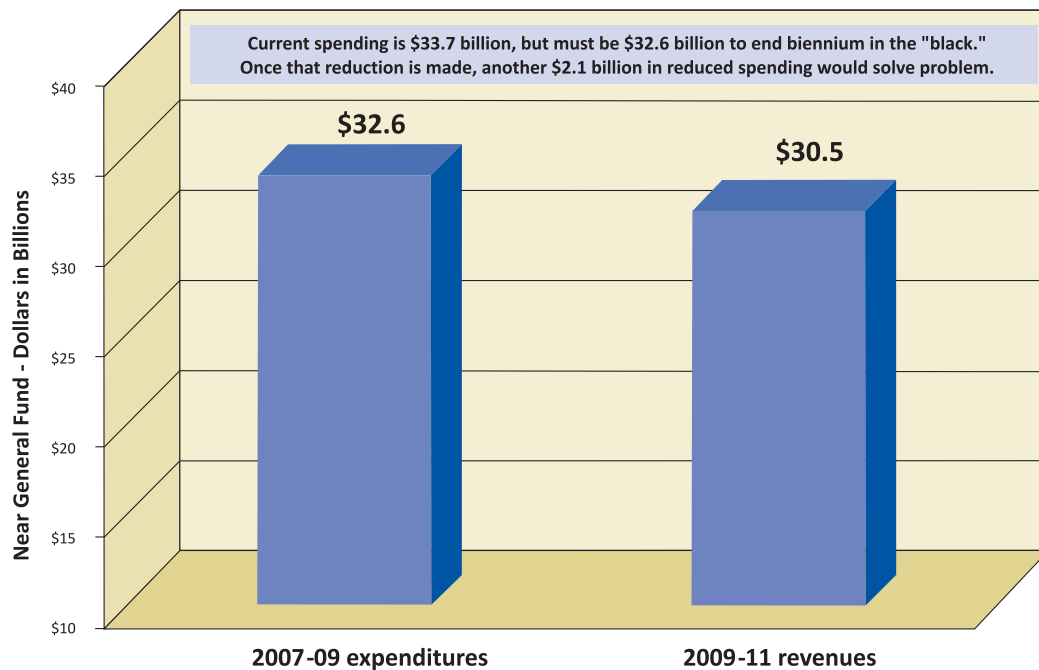
Yes, We Can Part I: The state is still collecting more money

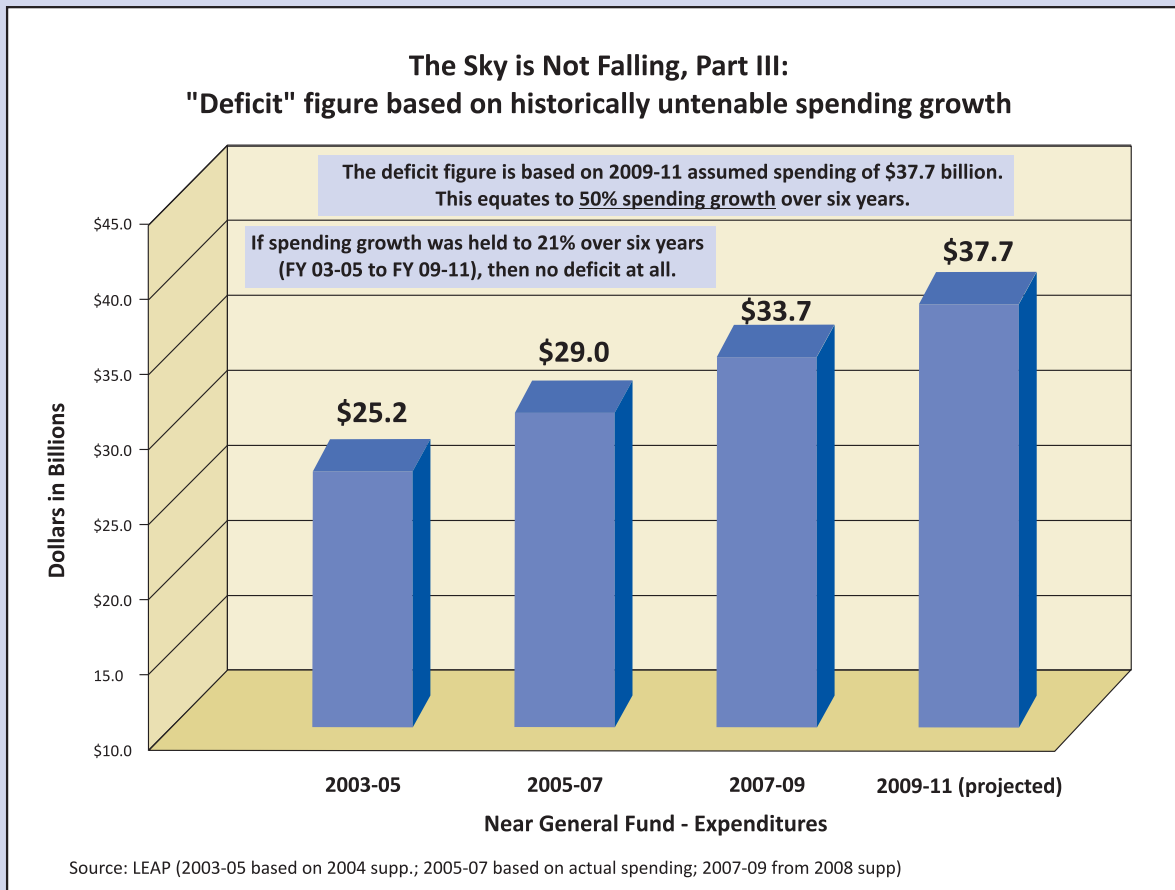


* Source: March Revenue Forecast (Near General Fund State)

Yes, We Can Part II:

Marginal reductions from current spending level can solve problem





What the Legislature should do:

- Balance this biennium's budget.
- From there it is \$2.1 billion in reduced spending to match projected 2009-11 revenues – **NOT** \$9 billion.
- Add entitlement caseloads and carry-forward costs, then reduce discretionary spending (based on priorities) to balance the new budget.

We must build the 2009-11 budget using these principles:

1. Protect services for the most vulnerable, even if it means sacrifices in other popular areas of the budget. For example, preserving services for the most needy and those with no income should have priority over pay raises for state employees who already have jobs.

2. Do not increase taxes and do not pass the buck to voters by asking them to approve a tax increase. Higher taxes will further hurt our economy. Taxpayers should not have to bail out state government's poor budgeting decisions.
3. Adopt a budget that is transparent and sustainable. Do not balance it with gimmicks that would only make future budget problems worse. Do not slash popular services first to make a case for tax or fee increases. Policy changes made to reduce spending need to be sustainable in future years.

Mid-Session Rewind

Senate Republicans win approval of “Lesson learned” bill

Senate Joint Resolution 8209, a proposed amendment to the Washington State Constitution, would require the deposit of “exceptional” state revenues into the rainy-day account. Between 2005 and 2007, the state collected \$2.4 billion that would have been saved, not spent, if SJR 8209 had been adopted prior to 2005.

Senate Republican bill to help ensure jail time for crooks that swindle the elderly passes

I am very pleased that a bill I introduced to help bring justice to those who swindle the elderly passed unanimously in the Senate. **Substitute Senate Bill 5380** would extend the statute of limitations for several felony crimes committed by deception. It’s a very sad fact that people, especially the elderly who live alone, fall prey to schemes that can be concealed because the perpetrator is otherwise associated with a legitimate business. People might not even know they’ve been swindled for years or in the case of elderly people, their families might discover the crime after the person dies. SSB 5380 is now before the House of Representatives for consideration.

Bill to create neighborhood voting districts passes Senate

It’s an oddity in some local government structures, like my own Spokane Valley, that it is possible to elect seven people from the same apartment complex to the city council. I introduced **Substitute Senate Bill 5716** to help spread out a city’s elected representatives and bring geographic diversity and more community involvement to our local governments. The bill would allow the citizens of a city to divide it into neighborhood voting districts.

Supporting our military families

I was very proud to support two measures aimed at making life easier for our brave men and women serving in uniform. **Substitute Senate Bill 5248** would make Washington a partner in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which allows military children moving to another state in mid-year to enter at the same grade level.

Senate Bill 5008 would make it more convenient for members of the U.S. military on active duty to obtain a hunting license in Washington. Under this proposal

any active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces, or any member of the National Guard or the reserves who has been called to active duty, may purchase a hunting license in Washington without the additional burden of completing a hunter safety course. Both bills are now before the House of Representatives for consideration.

Senate passes “everything but marriage” domestic partners bill

Washington law currently defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman. This law has been upheld by the Washington State Supreme Court. In the last two years, domestic partnerships between persons of the same sex were created in law and many rights of marriage were granted to domestic partners. This year’s measure, **Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5688**, grants full rights of marriage to same sex couples – a decision that belongs to the people. Senate Republicans offered an amendment to send the bill to the ballot, but it was rejected by the majority party. This bill is now before the House of Representatives for consideration.

Transportation

ESHB 1978 contains the 2009 Supplemental Transportation Budget. Major policy items include:

- \$16.5 million of additional funding for snow and ice removal;
- \$20 million of federal emergency funds for flood damage to highways;
- \$8.9 million for increased WSDOT and WSF fuel costs;
- \$6.2 million for ferry system operating costs;
- \$190,000 for rehabilitation of the SR 532/84th Ave NW bridge deck with intent language to provide an additional \$1.51 million in 2009-11; and
- Various transfers between transportation accounts to balance funds through June 30, 2009.

The federal stimulus bill provides funding for some shovel-ready programs. **SB 5458** implements the economic stimulus transportation funding and appropriations in Washington State. Among other projects, funding is provided for preservation/paving work on SR 206/Jct US 2 to Bruce Road.

OSPI’s plan to scrap the WASL

Beginning in spring 2010, the state will replace the WASL with two new tests: the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in grades 3-8 and the High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE).

2009 SESSION NEWSLETTER

The new state assessment system will be called the Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program (WCAP). Superintendent Randy Dorn has six goals related to state testing:

- Shorten the tests;
- reduce the amount of time students spend on written responses;
- return scores more quickly;
- increase the use of technology (statewide computer testing);
- provide more diagnostic information (strengths and weaknesses) to teachers/families; and,
- minimize costs.

Dorn's plan calls for computer-delivered reading, math and science tests to be available as an option to school districts beginning in 2010 with the goal of state-wide implementation by 2012.

In closing...

I hope you find this update informative. Please know that my door is always open should you find yourself in Olympia. If you have any questions about the topics covered in this newsletter or any other legislative matter, please do not hesitate to contact me or my office.