



316 Legislative Building • PO Box 40412 • Olympia WA 98504-0412  
E-MAIL: [parlette.linda@leg.wa.gov](mailto:parlette.linda@leg.wa.gov) • PHONE: (360)786-7622 • FAX: (360)786-1266

**Senate Republican Caucus Chair**

Committees: Financial Institutions, Housing and Insurance; Health and Long-Term Care;  
Ways and Means; Rules.

**Jan. 16, 2009**

Dear Friends,

The 2009 legislative session is under way and the first few days are already behind us. It was a busy week with legislators being sworn in to office, bills being introduced for consideration and the first round of committee hearings. Despite things proceeding as they normally do, it's easy to see that things this session will be anything but normal. The shadow of the growing budget deficit is looming large and will – as it should – affect everything we do in Olympia this year.

### **Sworn in for next four-year term**

On Jan. 12 at noon my Senate colleagues and I who were elected or re-elected in 2008 were sworn into office on the Senate floor. Washington State Supreme Court Chief Justice Gerry Alexander did the honors. You can watch video of the swearing-in ceremony [here](#).

### **Budget deficit continues to grow**

As I mentioned in my previous message to you, Washington is facing a nearly \$6 billion hole in the state budget. There is almost no doubt that number will grow, a fact that was brought home this month when we learned that December revenue collections came in \$98 million less than expected. That's on top of revenue projections being lowered by \$1.8 billion just the month prior. To put that in perspective, state revenue collections were 14 percent below what the state took in this time last year. This is the single largest year-over-year decline in a monthly period since these estimates have been recorded, nearly doubling the previous record of 7.2 percent. The next state revenue forecast will be released in mid-March. By some estimates it could show a state deficit of \$7 billion or larger.

Sometimes it's hard to get our minds around that "billion dollar" figure. Here's another way to look at it. One billion seconds ago it was 1978. Seven billion seconds ago it was 1787 and our constitution was still being written. You would have had to spend almost \$10,000 a day since Jesus was born to spend \$7 billion.

There will be many tough decisions to be made on the budget this year. As a member of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, I will have a front-row seat to things going on in that regard. I will keep you updated as we move forward on this issue.

### **A way to stop the "ups and downs" of state budgeting**

As mentioned above, Washington is facing the largest deficit in state history. Not only will the Legislature need to find a way to bring the budget back in line with spending, it should also take definitive steps to stop the rollercoaster of spending when times are good and making painful cuts when times are bad. The past few years have been times of extraordinary economic and revenue

growth. Unfortunately, the state budget committed to spending as if that extraordinary growth would continue forever.

This year I've co-sponsored a measure that would stop the state from over-obligating its spending and eliminate these "up and down" budgeting cycles. The proposed constitutional amendment would require any "extraordinary revenue growth" to be put into the state's newly created constitutional rainy-day fund. The funds could be tapped by a majority vote of the Legislature in bad economic times. If this proposal had already been in place, our current budget deficit would be about 20 percent of what it is today. You can read more about the proposal, prime-sponsored by our caucus budget leader Sen. Joseph Zarelli, [here](#).

### **Bills being introduced**

Beginning next week I will be sending out regular updates on bills I am sponsoring and co-sponsoring. I will continue to keep you informed about the measures I am working on, as well as key legislation, as they move through the legislative process.

### **Blewett Pass reopens**

With a goal of reopening the pass to traffic by Friday, January 16th, Washington State Department of Transportation crews and local contractors, led by Pipkin Construction, have worked day and night for eight straight days to accomplish temporary repairs. Even though new damage areas were being discovered daily, the crews set a goal to get the road open by the end of this week and they achieved that goal. A hearty congratulations and "job well done" is due to the workers involved in this massive project. Most, if not all, of the individuals involved are from our local community in North Central Washington. They have gone above and beyond to return travel to normal for the rest of us. Repair work will continue through this weekend but should not significantly affect traffic. More work will be done later this spring when weather allows crews to undertake permanent repairs.

If you would like to see pictures of what happened up on Blewett Pass, click [here](#).

### **Snoqualmie Pass closures and future work**

Some of you may also have questions about Snoqualmie Pass, especially in regards to frequent closures and the possibility of things like snow sheds to help the situation. There is a plan in the works to improve and widen a five-mile stretch of the roadway between Hyak and Keechelus Dam and build a new six-lane wide snow shed designed to fix five major avalanche chute areas. In a typical winter this particular area contributes to about 70 percent of the avalanche closures on Snoqualmie Pass (unfortunately, this is not a typical winter – this year the state Department of Transportation has had to deal with 30 avalanche chute areas). The project's cost is about \$600 million and is to be funded by the 9-1/2 cent gas tax increase passed in 2005. Major construction is scheduled to begin in 2010 and is estimated to last about five years. Once complete, this project should free up the DOT to concentrate on avalanche, cleanup and repair efforts in other areas, hopefully reducing – although probably not ever completely eliminating – closures during record snowstorms like the ones we've had this year. You can learn more about this project by clicking [here](#).

### **Obtaining a permit to burn flood debris**

Recent storms that flooded local rivers have left many of you with logs, brush or other woody trash on your property. If you want to burn flood debris state law requires you to obtain a permit to do so. Material is considered storm or flood debris if the storm or flood occurred in the last two years and the city, county or state government declared an emergency as a result of the storm or flood. Of the four counties in the 12th District – Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan – this emergency declaration has occurred only in Chelan County.

The best way to get a permit is to contact the Department of Ecology for a permit application. They also have the permit online – you can download it [here](#). Once Ecology receives your completed application, you should receive your burn permit within about seven working days.

Ecology has developed a fact sheet on the disposal of storm and flood debris. The document is located [here](#) on the agency's Web site. For more information you can contact the Department of Ecology at the numbers below:

- Chelan County – (509) 575-2490
- Douglas County – (509) 575-2490
- Grant County – (509) 329-3400
- Okanogan County – (509) 575-2490

Natural vegetation is also accepted for free at the Chelan County Compost Facility at 9073 Highway 2 in Dryden.

### **Katherine Schroeder serves as Senate page this week**

I was honored this week to sponsor Mansfield School student Katherine Schroeder as a Senate page. The page program is a great way for students to learn how state government works and is often an experience that stays with them for a lifetime. It is open to students ages 14 to 16-1/2 who want to experience the Legislature first-hand. During their week in Olympia pages deliver messages around the campus and serve on the Senate floor during floor sessions. They attend page school for two hours a day where they learn about the Legislature, write and present their own bills, and role-play as legislators in a mock committee hearing.

If your student is interested in being a Senate page this year, please give my office a call at (360) 786-7622. The legislative session is scheduled to run through April 26.

### **Good news from Leavenworth**

In 2008 the City of Leavenworth completed phases 1 and 2 of its downtown master plan. We just learned that the city was awarded a \$1 million loan from the state's Public Works Trust Fund for completing the engineering and design of this master plan. The work is on track to be completed by mid-summer 2009. Leavenworth is treasured not only locally, but worldwide. It is great to see the city continuing to make improvements and attract locals and visitors alike.

### **In closing...**

Thank you for your continued interest in what the Legislature is doing in Olympia. If there is anything I can do for you, please give my office a call. We would be happy to assist you. As always, if someone you know would like to receive these updates from Olympia I encourage you to have them contact me at [Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov). We'll make sure they get on our e-mail list.

All the best,

*Linda*

**LINDA EVANS PARLETTE**

**Washington State Senator, 12th District**

**(509) 663-9702 E-mail: [Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov)**

*Legislative Toll Free Hotline: 1-800-562-6000*

*For information about public hearings, proposed new laws, and the progress of bills you are interested in, please visit the Legislature's Information Web site at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)*