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Senate Republican Caucus Chair

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

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Dear Friends,

The 2009 legislative session is scheduled to end on Sunday, April 26. Between now and Sunday we have to pass the capital, transportation and operating budgets and wrap up the rest of our work. The Legislature is expected to work long days until we adjourn “Sine Die,” a Latin term associated with the end of the session.

Two days left – where do we stand?

There are just a matter of hours left to go in the session and there is still much work to be done. As you know, the big issue this year is the operating budget. There are actually three budgets to vote on:

- The **transportation budget** funds roads, ferries and transit. We appointed a conference committee which released the proposed final budget today. We could vote on it as early as tomorrow. The 12th District fared well in the budget and our major projects, including the George Sellar Bridge and Eastmont Extension, are included in it.
- The **capital budget** pays for the construction of public buildings, such as schools, as well as land acquisitions and state debt. The capital budget is usually the least controversial and engenders the most bipartisan support. That may be different this year because it appears funds may be taken from the capital budget to plug holes in the operating budget. We have not yet voted on a capital budget.
- The **operating budget** is the biggest budget that pays for most state services such as education, corrections and social service programs. The Senate has yet to vote on the operating budget. I will have more information for you about it once it comes to the Senate.

By Sunday, a majority of representatives and senators and the governor must all be on the same page if we are to pass the remainder of our budgets and end the session on time. As you may have read in the media, it is still possible that voters may be asked to pay for new taxes to fund programs. To take a look at more details on these budgets, you can visit the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program (LEAP) [Web site](#). I will have more details for you in my post-session update.

Communicating with you

One of my responsibilities as Senate Republican Caucus Chair is to serve as our lead senator on the Senate Facilities and Operations Committee, the committee that oversees Senate administration and expenses. The Senate, like other state agencies, is looking for ways to cut costs and trim our budget. To save money I will be forgoing a printed post-session newsletter and will send it instead by e-mail. You can look for that e-newsletter soon after session ends.

Bill updates

- **Property tax measure sent to governor.** The Legislature has passed [Senate Bill 5368](#), a measure I co-sponsored to require counties to perform annual property tax revaluations starting in 2014. The purpose of this measure is to avoid huge property tax spikes and keep property owners from paying higher taxes for years on property that has declined in value. The bill now goes to the governor for her consideration to sign into law.
- **Recreational fishing bill passes Senate.** This year I sponsored [Substitute Senate Bill 5421](#) to create the Columbia River Recreational Salmon and Steelhead Pilot Stamp Program. Funds from the stamp would be used to create additional salmon and steelhead fishing opportunities in the Columbia River and its tributaries. I am continuing to work with the majority party to get this bill passed.
- **Update on bill to change WSDOT regions.** In past e-mail updates I told you about [Engrossed Senate Bill 5682](#), a measure that would reduce the number of state Department of Transportation regions from seven to six and vastly expand our district's region. The bill passed the Senate on March 7 and is scheduled for a hearing tomorrow in the House Transportation Committee. I hope this bill does not pass the Legislature.

Another health care study bill passes Legislature

In 2008, the state contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to evaluate several state health care reform proposals. A bill I sponsored, [Senate Bill 5052](#), was one of the ideas studied. The proposal, which would give insurance companies the ability to design and offer affordable health plans to young adults ages 19 to 34, was the only one identified as providing more health care coverage at no cost to taxpayers. SB 5052 did not make it out of committee. Instead, the Legislature has passed [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5945](#), a measure that would create a work group to study the Mathematica report. Although I am disappointed the Legislature did not pass my bill, I will continue to pursue ways we can improve access to affordable health care in our state.

Bill would change the way Washington votes in presidential elections

[Senate Bill 5599](#) would align Washington's Electoral College votes according to the national popular vote – not how we vote here in Washington. The United States Constitution gives states the absolute right to determine the manner of awarding their electoral votes. Washington has always cast its electoral votes for the presidential candidate who received the most popular votes in our state. The measure was sent to the governor on April 21. It goes into effect when the majority of states enact the same law. I did not support SB 5599.

North Cascades Highway to reopen tonight

The SR 20 North Cascades Highway is scheduled to reopen to traffic at 8 p.m. this evening, a full week earlier than anticipated. The highway closed to traffic for the winter on Dec. 11. The Washington State Department of Transportation began clearing avalanche chutes and snow from

the highway four weeks ago in anticipation of the spring opening. Updates and photos are posted on the WSDOT SR 20 web page, www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/passes/northcascades.

In closing...

Thanks again for the privilege of representing you in Olympia this year. If everything goes as planned I'll be back in North Central Washington very soon. Watch for my post-session wrap-up next week.

All the best,

Linda

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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.