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Senate Republican Caucus Chair

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

April 3, 2009

Dear Friends,

There are just three weeks left in the 2009 legislative session. This week my Senate colleagues and I have been working on the operating, transportation and capital (construction) budgets. We spent most mornings this week on the Senate floor voting on bills. In the afternoons I and my fellow Ways and Means Committee members heard testimony on bills related to the capital and operating budgets.

Mark your calendars! Telephone Town Hall on April 7

On Tuesday, April 7 Rep. Cary Condotta and I will hold a 12th District telephone town hall. From 7 to 8 p.m. that evening we invite you to join the call and ask us questions about what's going on in Olympia. If you don't have any questions for us you can simply listen in to the discussion. You can do so by **dialing 1-877-229-8493** and entering **PIN # 13569**.

I held a similar event last year and found it was a great way to connect with many of you on issues related to state government and the Legislature.

12th District Telephone Town Hall
Senator Linda Evans Parlette and Rep. Cary Condotta
Tuesday, April 7
7 – 8 p.m.
Number to call: **1-877-229-8493**, enter PIN # **13569**

I hope you will mark this date on your calendars and consider participating. I look forward to hearing what's on your mind.

Senate, House unveiled operating budgets this week

This week the Senate and House unveiled their proposed 2009-11 operating budgets. Both budgets spend about \$31.5 billion, and that does not take into account the federal stimulus funds that will be utilized.

This budget is about two things: what are the **priorities**, and **where will this put our state in two years?**

First, we expect to take in as much revenue in the next two years as we will this biennium. That means this budget really does come down to priorities.

Second, this budget sets us up to be in an even worse situation two years from now because it continues to spend more than the state is expected to bring in.

Earlier this week Seattle's KING-TV covered this issue with Amber Gunn, a North Central Washington native now working for the Evergreen Freedom Foundation in Olympia. The interview explains many of the issues surrounding these budgets. You can watch it [here](#).

Over the next three weeks House and Senate budget writers will work together to iron out differences between the two budgets and come up with a final version for the full Legislature to consider before adjournment on Sunday, April 26.

I hope you will participate in the telephone town hall next week to hear more about the budget and offer me your input.

Legislation update

Several bills I sponsored are continuing to move through the legislative process, including:

- **Disclosing vehicle damage.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5388](#) would require auto dealers to disclose damage when selling a car, including to another dealer. SSB 5388 unanimously passed the House this week and is on its way to the governor.
- **Property tax annual valuations.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5368](#) would require annual revaluations of property for tax purposes, which would help eliminate huge spikes in property tax assessments and property tax bills. SSB 5368 is before the House Rules Committee.
- **Bill to aid young drivers.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5469](#) would ensure, for drivers with an intermediate driver's license, that being in an accident would no longer be grounds for denying the lifting of the license restrictions if there is another party to the accident and the other party was cited in connection with the accident. SSB 5469 passed the House Transportation Committee on March 16 and is now before the House Rules Committee.

A couple other bills I sponsored are considered "necessary to implement the budget" and are also still moving:

- **Protecting recreational fishing opportunities.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5421](#) would 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. The bill remains in the Senate, but could still be passed until the budget is finalized.
- **Property tax current use program.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5424](#) would lower the interest rate and remove the penalty if property is removed after 10 years in the "current use" program. This bill is in the House Finance Committee.

Transportation updates

- **Transportation funding plan.** This week the Senate passed its proposed two-year transportation budget (ESSB 5352). The list of 12th District transportation projects remained the same as what I reported to you last week. The House has crafted its own transportation funding plan that substantially affects four projects in our district:

Project delays or cuts

SR 28/Junction US 2 and US 97 to 9th St, Stage 1 - New Alignment

SR 28/E Wenatchee Access Control

US 97/S of Chelan Falls - Add Passing Lane

US 97/Orondo Northward - Paving

As with the operating budget, the two transportation committee chairs will work together to craft a final document. Let's hope the Senate transportation budget prevails.

- **Construction season begins April 6.** On Monday the Washington State Department of Transportation will begin its North Central Washington highway construction season with a \$3.1 million project to stabilize rock slopes along a two-mile section of US 2 between Wenatchee and Waterville. Other projects planned for the summer include the addition of a lane to George Sellar Bridge and paving on US 2 through Tumwater Canyon west of Leavenworth. You can keep an eye on the construction projects in our communities at the WSDOT North Central Region Construction Update/Travel Advisory webpage at: www.wsdot.wa.gov/regions/northcentral/construction
- **Bill to change WSDOT regions.** In a past e-mail update 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 measure is before the House Transportation Committee, which has until Monday (April 6) to pass the bill to the Rules Committee or it will be considered dead unless necessary to implement the transportation budget. I hope this bill dies in committee.
- **Bill relating to public transportation on Lake Chelan.** A couple weeks ago I mentioned to you [Substitute Senate Bill 5894](#), a measure that includes authorization for the state Utilities and Transportation Commission to study the issue of public transportation on Lake Chelan. The bill passed the House Transportation Committee and is now in House Rules.

Senate approves measure to help small cities with public works projects

[House Bill 1569](#) would authorize counties to establish public works trust funds to provide low-interest loans for small public works projects that might be too small to qualify for aid from the state public works trust fund. These loans can make a big difference for small communities. *HB 1569 has now passed both chambers and awaits a signature by the governor to become law.*

Bill introduced to impose 1 percent income tax on high wage earners

This week five senators introduced a bill to impose the first state income tax in Washington state. The measure, [Senate Bill 6147](#), authorizes a 1 percent income tax on individuals making over \$500,000 a year and married couples making over \$1 million a year.

This is exactly what happened in 1913 when the federal government created the federal income tax. It started at 1 percent and it applied only to the wealthiest people. It is widely believed that this bill could open the door to a state income tax for people of nearly any income. I believe this SB 6147 not move forward.

Temporary federal subsidy available for laid-off workers to continue health care insurance

A federal law called COBRA allows people to keep their former employer's health plan for up to 18 months if they pay the premiums themselves. The employer must still be in business and employ at least 20 workers. A temporary federal premium subsidy of 65 percent is available for nine months for workers laid off between September 1, 2008 and December 2008. People can apply for the subsidy even if they did not sign up for COBRA initially. For more information, contact the Washington Insurance Commissioner's Office toll free at 1-800-562-6900 or online at: <http://www.insurance.wa.gov/>.

In closing...

Thank you, as always, for your interest in what we're doing in Olympia. I hope you will participate in next week's telephone town hall. I look forward to the discussion and hearing from you about your priorities.

Have an enjoyable weekend!

All the best,

Linda

LINDA EVANS PARLETTE

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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.