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**Senate Republican Caucus Chair**

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

**Feb. 27, 2009**

Dear Friends,

We are nearly half way through the 2009 legislative session. On Wednesday we passed a key milestone, referred to as policy cut-off. This is when Senate bills referred to policy committees have to be voted out of those committees or they are considered dead unless necessary to implement the budget. Bills before the Ways and Means or Transportation committees have until Monday, March 2 to be voted on. We refer to this as fiscal cut-off.

Next week the full Senate will begin debating and voting on bills. That will go until March 12, when all bills must be voted out of their house of origin (House of Representatives of Senate) or they will be off the table for this year, unless necessary to implement the budget.

### **Can we balance the state budget without raising taxes? Yes, we can!**

There's been an increasing amount of talk in Olympia that the only way out of our budget challenges is to put a tax increase before voters. There's another way to approach the budget issue that shows the budget problem can be conquered without raising taxes. Sen. Zarelli, ranking Republican on the Senate budget-writing committee, has issued a new edition of his "Budget Tidbits: Just the Facts" on how it can be done. You can read the new Budget Tidbits [here](#).

### **Bills moving through the Legislature**

Many of the bills I sponsored this year made it past the policy committee cutoff date and are still moving. They include:

- **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 Senate on Thursday and is now before the House Commerce and Labor Committee .
- **Creating the Upper 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 Upper Columbia River and its tributaries. [Substitute Senate Bill 5421](#) is in the Senate Ways and Means Committee.
- **Keeping recreational opportunities available.** [Senate Bill 5422](#) would address a challenge that the Chelan County Public Utility District faces in keeping the Chelan Gorge area, which runs between the Chelan Dam and the Columbia River, open to kayakers. The bill would help the PUD meet the requirements put forward by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and provide it with liability protection for the use of its land and the release of water for kayaking. SB 5422 is on the floor calendar (the last stop before a full Senate vote).

- **Bill to aid young drivers.** [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 lifting the license restrictions if there is another party to the accident and the other party was cited in connection with the accident. SB 5469 is on the floor calendar.
- **Program for chronically ill kids.** [Senate Bill 5582](#) would allow the Washington State Patrol to partner with local law enforcement agencies and hospitals to name ill children "chief for a day." SB 5582 is on the floor calendar.
- **Designating counties, cities and towns as bona fide nonprofit organizations.** [Senate Bill 5645](#) would allow local governments to continue holding community raffles as long as the revenue is used for community activities or tourism promotion. SB 5645 is in the Senate Rules Committee.

### Property tax bills move forward

Two of the property tax bills I sponsored continue to move forward through the legislative process:

- **Annual assessments.** [Senate Bill 5368](#) would require annual revaluation of property for tax purposes and continue a \$5 fee on real estate transactions (set to expire in 2010) until 2013. Money from the fee is used for a grant program to help counties convert to an annual reassessment schedule. I prime-sponsored a bill nearly identical to SB 5368 this year, but when I was asked to co-sponsor the bill with Sen. Prentice, Ways and Means Committee chairwoman, I naturally said yes! SB 5368 received a hearing Jan. 28 and is in the Rules Committee.
- **Property tax current use program.** By law property removed from its current use must pay seven years' back taxes, interest at 12 percent a year on those taxes and a 20 percent penalty if two years' notice is not provided prior to removal. [Senate Bill 5424](#) would lower the interest rate and remove the penalty if the property is removed after 10 years in the program. SB 5424 received a hearing Feb. 4 and is in the Rules Committee.

### Committee cutoff claims some bills

Some of the bills I sponsored that did not make it out of policy committees include:

- **Job retention measure.** [Senate Bill 5362](#) would have kept Washington's minimum wage at \$8.55 an hour and eliminate the requirement that the rate be raised each year. SB 5342 died in the Senate Labor, Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.
- **More health care choices for school district employees.** [Senate Bill 5515](#) would have made health savings accounts available to school district employees. SB 5515 died in the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee.
- **Aiding school districts with their levies.** [Senate Bill 5887](#) (along with [SJR 8213](#)) would have amended the state Constitution to allow school districts to change their timing on school levies. Under the bill, the time period between the date a school district puts its levies on the ballot and the time the levy is collected could be expanded up to 18 months. This would make it easier for school districts to plan their budgets. SB 5887 and SJR 8213 will be studied over the interim so there are no unintended consequences. The bill will remain alive through 2010.
- **Allowing home inspectors to take their training either in a classroom or online.** [Senate Bill 5644](#) died in the Senate Labor, Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.

### Bill to provide affordable health care option for young adults dies in committee

Another bill that died in committee this year was [Senate Bill 5052](#), a measure that would have allowed 19 to 34 year olds, who make up 51 percent of the state's uninsured, to purchase affordable health care policies tailored to

their specific needs. Despite wide-spread support for this idea, the chair of the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee would not bring the bill up for a vote. This is especially disappointing because a recent report showed SB 5052 was the only major health care measure before the Legislature this year that would cover significantly more citizens at no cost to the state. In these tough budget times, the Legislature should be considering creative, affordable ideas like the ones captured in SB 5052.

### **Measure would affect North Central Washington**

This week the Senate Transportation Committee passed [Senate Bill 5682](#), a measure that would have a direct impact on North Central Washington. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is organized into six regions that are generally separated along county boundaries. SB 5682 would reduce the number of WSDOT regions from six to five and set the state on a path toward carving out a special WSDOT district for Puget Sound. Under the bill, our district's WSDOT region would be vastly expanded to run from Canada to the Oregon border. We would also lose our WSDOT office in Wenatchee. North Central Washington has very special and specific transportation needs, and our local communities, many of which are in the middle of major transportation projects, have a good relationship with our Wenatchee WSDOT office. This measure is in the Rules committee.

### **Fish and Wildlife Commission to take comments on proposed 2009-11 hunting rules**

The [Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission](#) will take final public input on a proposed three-year package of hunting seasons and rules on March 6-7, both days beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Quality Inn, 1700 Canyon Road in Ellensburg. The seasons include hunts for deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, black bear, cougar and small game.

Details on all proposed rules are available on the Department of Fish and Wildlife's [Web site](#). The proposals were developed after extensive public involvement last year and are based on the 2009-15 Game Management Plan. More details are available at this [link](#).

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

Thank you for your interest in what's going on in Olympia and the opportunity to serve as your state senator. If there is anything my office staff or I can do for you, please give me a call. We're happy to help.

All the best,

*Linda*

**LINDA EVANS PARLETTE**

**Washington State Senator, 12th District**

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