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**Senate Republican Caucus Chair**

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

**March 13, 2009**

Dear Friends,

Greetings again from Olympia. We just finished up the ninth week of the 2009 legislative session; there are six weeks to go before the session is scheduled to end on April 26. On Thursday we reached an important date when all Senate and House bills had to be voted out of their respective chambers or they are considered dead unless necessary to implement the budget. Now we are heading back into committee meetings to hold hearings on bills passed by the House.

**Budget update**

A couple weeks ago I mentioned that there is discussion in Olympia about the possibility of putting a tax increase before voters as a way to address the state's budget deficit. While we continue to hear talk along these lines, many of my colleagues and I have advocated for another approach – balancing the budget without raising taxes. Ten newspapers across the state have agreed with our position, including [The Wenatchee World](#), [The Seattle Times](#), the [Walla Walla Union Bulletin](#), [The Columbian](#), [Everett Herald](#) and the [Yakima Herald-Republic](#).

Can we balance the state budget without raising taxes? [Yes, we can!](#) I will continue to have updates for you on this issue as we see budget details in the coming weeks.

**Bill to change Department of Transportation regions passes Senate**

Recently I let you know 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 WSDOT.

On Wednesday evening the Senate passed SB 5682. I spoke against it, raising concerns about what it might do to the department's ability to focus on North Central Washington's major transportation projects and provide quick responses to our urgent transportation needs. The Legislature has deliberated a similar WSDOT reorganization twice before, and both times it was decided that the role of the Legislature is to legislate, not to administrate state agencies. This bill is now in the House; I will keep you posted on its progress.

**Senate passes current use measure**

On Thursday the state Senate unanimously passed [Substitute Senate Bill 5424](#), a measure I prime-sponsored to protect property owners from penalties and interest when they change the use of their property. By law property removed from its current use is subject to 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. SSB 5424 would lower the interest rate and remove the penalty if the property is removed after 10 years in the program. The bill is now in the House of Representatives for consideration.

## Legislation update

Three of the bills I sponsored have passed the Senate and are the subject of House committee hearings. Another is still moving through the process.

- **Property tax annual valuations.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5368](#) would require annual revaluations of property for tax purposes, which would help eliminate the huge spikes in property tax assessments and property tax bills.. The bill has been referred to the House Finance Committee and was the subject of a hearing today, on March 13.
- **Disclosing vehicle damage.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5388](#) would require auto dealers to disclose damage when selling a car, including to another dealer. SSB 5388 was the subject of a hearing this morning in the House Committee on Commerce and Labor.
- **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 lifting 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 Senate on Monday and is scheduled for a hearing in the House Transportation Committee on March 16.
- **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. This 4-year pilot program would take effect in 2010; the Legislature would receive a recommendation in 2014 on whether the program should be continued. Authority for the program would expire in 2016 unless the Legislature extends the program or makes it permanent. Although this bill has not yet passed the Senate, it is exempt from this week's cutoff because it is deemed necessary to implement the budget.

## “Gift to future Legislators” bill passes Senate

This week the Senate passed [Senate Joint Resolution 8209](#), a proposed constitutional amendment I co-sponsored that would require “extraordinary” state revenue – defined as revenue collected in excess of 133 percent of the state's 10-year revenue growth average – to be transferred to the state's rainy day reserve fund.

If SJR 8209 had been adopted prior to 2005, \$2.4 billion would have been saved, and not spent, between 2005 and 2007. This is a common-sense measure that will force future Legislatures to save, not spend, these exceptional revenues and have money available to even out the budgeting process in bad economic times. This measure is a constitutional amendment which needs to be approved by the voters before it goes into effect.

## Controversial bills still alive

Several controversial bills are still moving through the Legislature. They include:

- **Cap-and-trade.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5735](#) would move Washington closer toward implementing a cap-and-trade program, but leaves many of the details to the Department of Ecology to study. If eventually enacted, a cap-and-trade program would set limits on the amount of carbon companies could emit and tax anything above the limit. Some fear this would result in increased utility bills and lost jobs. There was an amendment offered to the bill that would have moved this important effort to a well-respected independent think tank, the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, instead of the Department of Ecology. The amendment did not pass.
- **Universal health care.** [Substitute Senate Bill 5945](#) would create the Washington health partnership plan work group to explore offering universal health coverage to every resident of the state by 2012.
- **Home warranty bill.** [Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5895](#) would require new, tougher warranties for home-builders, as well as things like certification for workers doing jobs like framing. Opponents of the bill believe it will drive up the cost of insurance for builders and increase the costs of homes, and that new homebuyers already have protection from shoddy work under state law. This measure narrowly passed the Senate with a vote count of 25 yeas and 24 nays. SB 5895 is now before the House Judiciary Committee.
- **Retrospective rating programs.** [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6035](#) would restrict the use of recouped money, require a plan for its use and require prior approval from member businesses for any other use. The “retro” program, as it is known, allows small businesses to work together to increase safety and reduce workers’ compensation costs. Trade associations recoup money in exchange for safety improvements among their member businesses – which all voluntarily join the trade association. This was another measure which passed the Senate with a narrow margin of 25 yes votes and 24 no votes.

## Bill would help those suffering with mental illness access Medicaid

Under state and federal Medicaid rules a person who is incarcerated is not eligible for Medicaid health care coverage. The state does not allow people to apply for Medicaid until they can show they will become eligible within 45 days. For a person who is mentally ill and in jail, this determination is not always possible. As a result, when they are released they must wait a long time to get the health care they need. This can put them into a downward spiral and back in jail. [Substitute Senate Bill 6024](#) would allow a person to apply for Medicaid and public assistance when the date at which he or she would become eligible is not known or is further than 45 days away. With this change, advocates for the mentally ill would be able help someone regain or obtain Medicaid coverage as soon as it is needed. This bill is now before the House of Representatives for consideration.

## Easy online access to financial education in a variety of formats and venues

The Washington State Department of Financial Institutions has created new points of access for Washington consumers to get the latest information on how to protect and improve their financial well-being including: [Financial Education Clearinghouse](#), [Financial Education Blog](#), [Financial Education Twitter](#), [How DFI Protects Consumers](#), [Financial Education YouTube Channel](#), [Consumer Twitter Page](#) and [Financial Education Calendar](#).

**In closing...**

Thank you for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia as your state senator. I appreciate your interest in what the Legislature is doing that affects you; if you have any questions or if there is anything my staff or I can do for you, please don't hesitate to ask. We are happy to help.

All the best,

*Linda*

**LINDA EVANS PARLETTE**

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