



League of Women Voters of Washington

Barbara Seitle, President // Barbara L. Bush, Action Chair // Newsletter edited by Stasha McBride

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January 12 - January 16, 2009

A NEW YEAR, NEW LEGISLATURE, NEW CHALLENGES

The new Legislature convened on January 12 facing tremendous budget challenges. We all know that this year tax revenues aren't just down, they are WAY down. The latest state revenue projections estimated that taxes would be \$5.6 billion less than necessary to continue current programs over the 2009-11 biennium. With the continuing downturn in the economy it is possible that when new revenue projections are published in February the \$5.6 billion shortfall could go to as much as \$7.0 billion.

The Governor has proposed a budget with no new taxes, salary freezes for teachers and state employees, and severe cuts in many programs about which we Leaguers care deeply. She would also make up part of the \$5.6 billion with money from the proposed federal stimulus package and the state's Rainy Day Fund.

Both houses of the Legislature have already started work on the Supplemental Budget that covers the first six months of 2009, and on their own budget plans for 09-11. All of these plans must be melded together into a final budget to be enacted by April 26. Simply understated, **this will be a very difficult session.**

New taxes or revenue increases are not on the table at this time. Some legislators have talked about sending a package of revenue raisers to a vote of the people "if that becomes necessary."

The Lobby Team will be monitoring the budget legislation for all of our issue areas, and working to defend valued programs. When appropriate, we will ask -- **and I hope all of you will respond** -- that you let our elected representatives know of our concerns and proposals.

While the budget will dominate this year, important policy bills will also be moving, and we will be working hard on those, as well. Future Legislative Newsletters will have reports on bills as they are introduced. Each year several thousand bills are introduced; only a small number make it all the way through the legislative process. Try as we might, we occasionally miss one we should be following. Please, if you know of a bill that's important to League, let either the Lobby Team member or me, as Action Chair, know about it.

I've heard some policymakers say, "The League never met a tax it didn't like." I say, "We never met a challenge we didn't respond to." Let's make our responses match the challenges this session!

Barb Bush
Action Chair

Action Items

Support HB1133 Modifying provisions of the energy independence act

The League supported Initiative 937, which passed. This bill modifies the same things in the law, but preserves the intent of the initiative. The bill requires large utilities to obtain a greater percent of their electricity from renewable resources such as solar and wind.

League Position - (LWVUS) The League supports predominant reliance on renewable resources.

Status - This bill is being heard Monday 1/19 in the House Technology, Energy & Communications Committee at 1:30 pm.

ACTION - Call members of the committee: [McCoy](#), [Eddy](#), [Crouse](#), [Haler](#), [Carlyle](#), [Condotta](#), [Finn](#), [Hasegawa](#), [Herrera](#), [Hinkle](#), [Hudgins](#), [Jacks](#), [McCune](#), [Morris](#), [Takko](#), [Van De Wege](#). Urge them to support the bill in a way that maintains the intent of Initiative 937. Oppose amendments that distort the intent.

Contact - Toni Potter antoniapotter@comcast.net 206 365 8949

Support HB 1004 Adding products to the energy efficiency code

This bill requires that certain products sold in the state meet specified requirements for efficiency. Energy efficient products release fewer green house gases into the atmosphere, thus reducing environmental damage.

League Position - (LWVUS) The League supports use of a variety of energy sources, with emphasis on conserving energy and using energy-efficient technologies.

Status - This bill will be heard Wednesday 1/21 before the House Technology, Energy & Communications Committee at 8am.

ACTION - Call members of the committee: [McCoy](#), [Eddy](#), [Crouse](#), [Haler](#), [Carlyle](#), [Condotta](#), [Finn](#), [Hasegawa](#), [Herrera](#), [Hinkle](#), [Hudgins](#), [Jacks](#), [McCune](#), [Morris](#), [Takko](#), [Van De Wege](#). Urge them to support the bill.

Contact - Toni Potter antoniapotter@comcast.net 206 365 8949

Support HB 1091 Regarding the withdrawal of public groundwaters for stock-watering purposes

Groundwater withdrawals must have a water right; however, there is a 5000 gallon per day exemption for specific purposes outlined in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). This bill clarifies a confusing aspect of water rights regulation by adding the 5000 gal per day limit to use of public groundwaters for stock-watering.

League Position - The League supports wise planning for water use and enforcement of laws affecting water quantity and quality management.

Bill Status - in the Agriculture & Natural Resources committee

ACTION - Watch this bill for amendments and support the intent, which is to address the quantities of unmetered stock water withdrawn from groundwater.

Contact - Denise Smith groundwatersmith@msn.com 425 392 9339

Support HB 1179 Requiring a permit to use public groundwaters to water a lawn

Groundwater withdrawals must have a water right; however, there is a 5000 gallon per day exemption for specific purposes outlined in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW). This bill removes lawn watering from the 5000 gal per day exemption list, which has been an obstacle to water quantity management particularly in areas with over appropriation of groundwater.

League Position - The League believes water use efficiency practices are essential to maintaining state water resources.

Bill status - in Agriculture & Natural Resources

Contact - Denise Smith groundwatersmith@msn.com 425 392 9339

Support HB 1143 Increasing the availability of safe sex offender housing

This bill sums up the unique risks that sex offenders present to law enforcement, corrections personnel, and local communities. It requires the department of corrections to study ways to increase the availability of sex offender housing and to consult with individuals and organizations experienced in working with sex offenders. The department of corrections would be required to report findings to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature by December 1, 2009.

Status - referred to the Human Services Committee. No hearing date has been announced.

Contact - Betty Sullivan jaybetty2@msn.com 206 682 5240

Support HB 1173 Creating programs to increase affordable housing and end homelessness

This bill recognizes the housing/homelessness crisis in the state and establishes 2020 as the date when, with statewide effort, we should end the affordable housing crisis. [HB 1173](#) creates the State Affordable Housing for All program in the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development. A plan will be prepared and updated yearly by this agency with the goal of achieving a decent, affordable and healthy home for all by 2020. Each county will create an ending homelessness task force and adopt a plan, which will be updated annually. [HB 1173](#) allows counties to opt out of this planning process. The Department of Social and Health Services will collaborate with the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development in this planning. The Washington Institute for Public Policy will conduct a study to determine the most effective and comprehensive way to measure, and evaluate, the costs of homelessness. Not more than one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) is allocated for this study, which will be presented to the legislature by June 30, 2010.

Status - This bill is scheduled for a public hearing in the House Committee on Local Government & Housing at 10:00 a.m. on January 22, 2009.

Contact – Betty Sullivan jaybetty2@msn.com 206 682 5240

Support [HB 1147](#) Modifying provisions of local option taxes

This bill would allow the county legislative authority to impose a sales and use tax, equal to one-tenth of one percent, for the operation of chemical dependency or mental health treatment programs and services. These would include treatment services, case management, and housing. This bill would require that voters, at a primary or general election, approve the measure by a majority vote. The rate of tax may not exceed three-tenths of one percent of the selling price. Motor vehicles are exempt from this tax.

Status - This bill was referred to Health Care & Wellness. No hearing date has been announced.

Contact - Betty Sullivan jaybetty2@msn.com 206 682 5240

Issue Background Items

HEALTH CARE

Legislators have their work cut out for them this Legislative Session. Governor Gregoire's proposed 2009-2011 Budget contains approximately \$990 million of cuts in health care. Some of these include a 42% cut in funding to the Basic Health Plan, the elimination of funding for the General Assistance Unemployable (GAU), a reduction in Medicaid funding by \$11.2 million (which are Federal matching dollars, making the entire cut \$22.4), and other cuts in care for the mentally ill, for those in need of drug rehabilitation, and many others. Legislators had many hearings during the first week of this Legislative Session with those most affected by the proposed cuts in health care. The Legislature will need to consider the Governor's suggested adjustments in the budget to determine how to balance the budget and consider the health care needs of all Washingtonians.

Contact: Susan Eidenschink, susaneiden@harbornet.com, 253 572 9305

TRANSPORTATION

So far in this session there have been a number of Senate and House meetings in which the various agencies have presented their reports and plans. There have been no significant bills introduced, nor any schedule of public hearings, but there are a number of issues emerging. The major issue is the funding of mega-projects and the ferry service, how much of these will be pared down and how, and who, shall pick up the cost. The Governor has already announced her support for a deep bore tunnel for the Alaskan Way Viaduct and supposedly supports Washington State Ferries (WSF) long range plan B for a reduction in vessel procurement and in ferry service. It is apparent that local levels of government will be required to raise local taxes to supplement what is needed in funding. Tolling and ferry fares will also be issues that will come up in this session. One of the unknown factors is the potential stimulus package from the federal government. Lists are being developed by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) of shovel ready projects and will certainly affect this session's budget.

Contact: Luella Wells, lawells@wavecable.com, 360-598-3267

THE STATE BUDGET

During this 2009 “long session” the legislature must pass and the Governor sign a two-year budget for the 2009-11 biennium.

Overall state spending is actually divided among three different budgets:

- **Operating Budget** which covers day to day operations of state government (this budget includes dedicated funds and federal funds)
- **Transportation Budget** which covers transportation activities such as designing and maintaining roads and public transit
- **Capital Budget** which covers acquiring and maintaining state buildings, public schools, higher education facilities, public lands, parks and other assets.

The largest single fund within the Operating Budget is the **State General Fund**. It is the principal state fund supporting the operation of state government. Moneys from the General Fund are allocated to:

- Public Schools
- Higher Education
- Human Services
- Natural Resources
- Government Operations
- Debt Service/Other

The General Fund gets so much attention during the budget-building process because it is the fund that receives all major state tax revenues [sales tax, property tax (state portion), B & O tax, real estate tax, and others]. When state tax revenues are up, policymakers can allocate more money to General Fund programs. When state tax revenues are down – as they are at this time – they must cut allocations to programs or enact new revenue sources.

Often, when reports speak of “The Budget”, as in “The Governor’s Proposed Budget” or “The Senate’s Budget”, it is really The General Fund portion of the Operating Budget that is being discussed. The Transportation Budget and Capital Budget have their own sources of funding, distinct from the General Fund. It’s important to distinguish these other “budgets” that carry important parts of our state’s activities.

[Compiled from materials prepared by the Senate Ways and Means staff]

Contact - Barbara Bush omi.bush@verizon.net 425-349-5184

For Reference

KEY SESSION DATES

The 61st Washington State Legislature opened its long session on Monday, January 12. The 2009 legislative session in Olympia runs from January 12 to April 26. Every day (including Saturday, Sunday, and holidays) is counted in the 105-day session. The Lobby Team will meet regularly during the session to talk with the League lobbyist, Lonnie Johns-Brown, and to decide on priority action for the upcoming week.

Jan. 12 – First day of regular session

Feb. 25 – Last day to read in committee reports in house of origin, except House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees

Mar. 2 – Last day to read in committee reports from House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees in house of origin.

Mar. 12 – League Lobby Day

Mar. 12 – Last day to consider bills in house of origin (5 p.m.)

Mar. 30 – Last day to read in committee reports from opposite house, except House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees.

Apr. 6 - Last day to read in opposite house committee reports from House fiscal committees and Senate Ways & Means and Transportation committees.

Apr. 17 - Last day to consider opposite house bills (5 p.m.) (except initiatives and alternatives to initiatives,

budgets and matters necessary to implement budgets, differences between the houses, and matters incident to the interim and closing of the session).*

Apr. 26 - Last day allowed for regular session under state constitution.

* After the 96th day, only initiatives, alternatives to initiatives, budgets and matters necessary to implement budgets, messages pertaining to amendments, differences between the houses, and matters incident to the interim and closing of the session may be considered.

CONTACT LISTS

Portfolios / Lobby Team – <http://www.lwwwa.org/about/officers.html>

Legislators – <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/Default.aspx>

Legislative Committees – www.leg.wa.gov/legislature/committeelisting.aspx

LEAGUE POSITIONS

LWVWA positions – <http://www.lwwwa.org/advocacy/Program%20In%20Action%20website.pdf>

RESOURCES

League action website - http://www.lwwwa.org/advocacy/advocacy_index.html

House Floor Activity as it happens – flooractivityext.leg.wa.gov/default.aspx?chamber=3

Senate Floor Activity as it happens – flooractivityext.leg.wa.gov

Public hearings as they happen – tvw.org

Bill information – text, analysis, status, committee action – apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo

Bill room (legislative information center) – **360-786-7573**

State budget information – www.ofm.wa.gov

Governor's website – governor.wa.gov

Washington state's official website – access.wa.gov

Speaking to a Legislator

Visit, write to, call, or email the legislator directly (follow "Legislators" link above). Or, use the toll-free Legislative Hotline available weekdays from 8:00 am - 8:00 pm, and Saturdays from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm:

800-562-6000 / TTY: 800-635-9993

Legislative hotline operators will send your message to one of your legislators, all three of your legislators, the governor and lieutenant governor, or all of these, as you request. Language translation services are also available. Person placing the call needs to know enough English to understand "Please Wait" and to report the language needed.

Addressing a Letter to a Legislator

Representative _____ Senator _____

P.O. Box 40600 P.O. Box 404[leg district]

Olympia, WA 98504-0600 Olympia, WA 98504-04[leg district]

Visiting Your Legislators

Citizens are welcome to visit their legislators in Olympia on any day during the session. Making an appointment first is prudent but not always required. Later in the session, town hall meetings back in the legislators' home districts are good opportunities for talking to your legislators. Lobby day events provide organized support for visits.