ELECTED OFFICIALS and their functions

The nine elected executives serve a four-year term. All run independently. The Superintendent of Public Instruction may not declare a partisan affiliation. They are listed in their order of ascension to the office of Governor.

Governor

The State Constitution assigns the Governor the "supreme executive power of this state." This role is continuously redefined through constitutional and statutory changes and through accepted practice.

The Governor is head of the executive branch of government, but also has legislative responsibilities, as well as serving as an agent of communications with other states and the federal government.

The Governor's executive branch responsibilities include appointing the heads of departments, agencies, and institutions. Also, mid-term vacancies in certain positions outside the executive branch, such as judges, are filled initially by gubernatorial appointment.

By holding cabinet meetings, communicating with other state officers and overseeing budget expenditures, the Governor fulfills the responsibility to "see that the laws are faithfully executed." The Governor further fulfills this responsibility by serving as an ex-officio member on a number of boards and commissions.

The Governor's legislative responsibilities include reporting to the Legislature annually on affairs of the state (the State of the State Address) and submitting a budget recommendation. Other legislative recommendations may also be issued by the Governor. Further, the Governor may veto legislation passed by the Legislature and may convene the Legislature in extraordinary session.

Other duties assigned to the Governor include serving as commander-in-chief of the state's military establishment (the National Guard), except when it has been called into federal service. Pardoning power also is vested in the Governor, subject to regulations and restrictions prescribed by law.

In addition, the Governor makes countless personal appearances at public and private events, and issues proclamations relating to matters of interest to the people of Washington.

Lieutenant Governor

The function of the Lieutenant Governor is to act as Governor if the Governor is removed from office or is unable to perform the duties of the office, to be the presiding officer of the Senate, to serve as acting Governor when the Governor is absent from the state, and to discharge other duties as prescribed by law.

The Lieutenant Governor serves by tradition as Chair of the Senate Rules Committee. The Lieutenant Governor is a member of the State Finance Committee, State Capitol Committee, the Washington Health Care Facilities Authority, the Washington Higher Education Facilities Authority, and the State Medal of Merit Committee.

Secretary of State

The office of the Secretary of State was established with the adoption of the State Constitution in 1889.

Elections

The Secretary of State is the state's chief elections officer, and as such, is responsible for supervising all state and local elections. The Elections Division produces and distributes the state's voters' pamphlet, verifies petition signatures on initiatives and referendums, accepts declarations of candidacy for federal and state offices, administers voter registration programs, canvasses state election returns, and tests and certifies electronic voting equipment.

Corporations

All corporations doing business in Washington must register with the Secretary of State through the agency's Corporations Division. These registrations provide information about a corporation's officers, and other related data for use by financial and legal services, law enforcement agencies, the IRS, and the general public.

Archives

The Secretary of State is responsible for collecting and preserving the historical records of the state, and making those records available for research. Records dating back to 1854 are held by the agency's Archives Division at the state capital and at five regional repositories across the state.

State Library

The Washington State Library became a part of the Secretary of State's Office in 2002. The State Library opened in 1853. Since 1889, the date of the first legislative session, the library has recorded every bill introduced in the Legislature. Its collections include the Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the papers of renowned activists like Emma Smith Devoe, details of Pacific Northwest science explorations of the 19th century, and medical books dating back to the 1600's.

Other functions of the Secretary of State include: registering all organizations involved in soliciting the public for charitable donations; administering the state's Productivity Board encouraging state employees to create solutions to make the state more efficient and effective; managing the Address Confidentiality Program for victims of domestic violence; affixing the State Seal and attesting to certain documents issued by the Governor; and certifying certain matters to the Legislature.

In addition to these constitutional and statutory duties, the Secretary of State is frequently called upon to greet and confer with dignitaries and delegations visiting the state of Washington from other countries.

State Treasurer

As the state's chief financial officer, the Treasurer provides for the banking, financial and investment needs of state government.

Revenues and other funds collected by state agencies are transmitted to the Treasurer daily. The Treasurer is responsible for distributing these funds to state agencies, counties, cities and school districts. As the state's disbursement officer, the Treasurer signs more than 5.4 million warrants annually. But, increasingly, the transactions are made electronically.

Treasury receipts, including investment transactions, average more than $310 million daily. Early every morning the Treasurer invests all cash in excess of the state's daily needs in short-term securities. In fiscal year 1995 the Treasurer's cash management investments averaged nearly $1.9 billion daily and earned taxpayers $128 million in interest.

The Treasurer is custodian for all state-owned investments (securities, bonds, stocks, etc.), including $30 billion in state pension and accident insurance funds managed by the State Investment Board. The Treasurer is one of nine members of the State Investment Board.

The Treasurer, on behalf of the State Finance Committee, issues state bonds to finance state construction projects and pays interest and principal to the state's bondholders.

The Treasurer chairs the Public Deposit Protection Commission which ensures the safety of all public deposits held in qualified commercial banking institutions in the state.

State Auditor

The State Auditor has the important responsibility to ensure that state and local governments are accountable to the public

they serve. The Washington State Constitution establishes the office as the auditor of all public accounts. Every public dollar spent by state agencies and local governments comes under the Auditor's purview.

The office's primary service is the performance of regular financial and legal compliance audits of all state agencies and local governments. There are more than 2,400 local governments in Washington including all cities, counties, schools, ports and special purpose districts. Also audited are all state agencies, boards and commissions, including public colleges and universities. Fraud and other special investigations are also performed.

In addition, the Auditor administers the Employee Disclosure, or "Whistleblower Act", and investigates citizen reports of government impropriety. As an elected office, the State Auditor has the independence necessary to objectively perform audits and investigations.

Other responsibilities include prescribing local governments' uniform budgeting, accounting and reporting systems; training and technical assistance; prescribing the accounting manual for public school districts jointly with the Superintendent of Public Instruction; annually publishing local government comparative statistics; and coordinating the audit efficiency and quality assurance program.

With a staff of nearly 300 located strategically around the state, the Auditor's Office is able to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

Attorney General

The office of the Attorney General is the largest law firm in the state of Washington. The office is headed by the Attorney General, the state's chief legal officer. The office is also staffed by attorneys, appointed as Assistant Attorneys General, administrative, investigative, paralegal, secretarial and other staff members.

The Attorney General has a broad array of responsibilities unique and necessary to the operations of state government. These responsibilities include: serving as legal counsel to the Governor, members of the Legislature, state officials, and the more than 230 state agencies, boards and commissions; defending the state officials and employees for actions performed in their official capacities; advising and representing the state agencies so they can fulfill their official duties; and issuing legal opinions. The Attorney General also enforces the Consumer Protection Act, and advises and assists local prosecuting attorneys when requested.

Superintendent of Public Instruction

As head of the state educational agency and Chief Executive Officer of the State Board of Education, the Superintendent is responsible for the administration of the total state kindergarten through twelfth grade education program. This includes administering approximately 46 percent of the state general fund, and providing the following services:

- Administers the basic education program for more than 956,572 Washington public school students and over 747,009 students attending approved private schools;
- Prepares the biennial state budget and administers that budget for the 296 school districts of the state;
- Grants certificates for teachers, administrators and others to work in the state's schools;
- Develops and disseminates curriculum guidelines and provides curriculum assistance to school districts;
- Administers the accreditation and school approval process for both public and private schools;
- Prepares state rules and regulations for disabled, gifted, remedial, health services, food services, vocational, basic education, bilingual, and other state programs;
- Reviews expenditures of local school districts and provides statistical analysis;
- Regulates apportionment of federally-supported program funds, including Goals 2000; and
- Administers education programs for children in state institutions.

Commissioner of Public Lands

The Commissioner of Public Lands is the elected head of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), one of the largest natural resource agencies in the nation.

The Board of Natural Resources, chaired by the Commissioner of Public Lands, establishes policy for the department.

The department has four primary roles: land manager, regulator, firefighter, and conservator.

Land Manager

The department, led by the Lands Commissioner, manages about 5 million acres of public lands. DNR manages about 2 million acres of forest lands and 1 million acres of agricultural and grazing lands as well as urban properties, generating income to support school construction, colleges, counties, state institutions and other beneficiaries.

DNR manages nearly 2 million acres of state-owned aquatic lands – tidelands, harbors and the beds of navigable waterways – to benefit the people of Washington.

Regulator

DNR oversees dozens of resource-based businesses at the foundation of Washington's economy. The department enforces laws regulating logging practices, reforestation requirements, petroleum and natural gas exploration and surface mine reclamation.

Firefighter

The department's wildlife protection and suppression programs cover about 12 million acres of state and private forest land. Fighting fire is a priority that spans every level of DNR's seven regions and 13 divisions.

Conservator

DNR has taken a lead role in preserving Washington's natural heritage. A rapidly growing system of Natural Area Preserves and Natural Resources Conservation Areas protects sites of outstanding beauty and environmental significance.

DNR's responsibilities are linked by a guiding commitment to be good stewards of Washington's natural resources.

Insurance Commissioner

Consumer protection is the most important job of the Insurance Commissioner.

When the office was created by the first state Legislature in 1889-90, its main function was simply to register insurance companies that wanted to do business in Washington. Today, the role has expanded to include overall industry regulation, making sure companies meet all their obligations and abide by the rigorous financial and legal standards set for doing business in this state.

About 50 of the 1,500 authorized insurers in Washington State today are "domestic" insurers, which means they have their headquarters in the state. In addition, the agency is responsible for the testing, licensing and oversight of more than 36,000 individual companies and licenses each year.

Any citizen may file a complaint with the Insurance Commissioner and request an investigation of that complaint. The Consumer Protection Division routinely fields more than 200,000 contacts a year, many of them via a special toll-free hot line: 1-800-562-6900.

Seniors on Medicare or other retirement benefits have access to a special arm of the agency. The Senior Health Insurance Benefits Advisors are trained by the experts on the Commissioner's staff and are available in most Washington communities to meet with other seniors to discuss health-insurance concerns.

The Commissioner's office collects a special tax levied on insurance companies and turns over more than $100 million a year to the state's general fund. The insurance industry also must pay for its own regulation. Companies share that cost according to the amount of business they do in the state.

If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation, please contact the House at (360) 786-7107, or the Senate at (360) 786-7400. TTY 1-800-635-9993. For further legislative information, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000 or check the internet at: http://www.leg.wa.gov (revised 3/05)