



The Weekly Page

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Pages Learn About Legislature



Big ideas in government

Throughout the week pages grappled with understanding the three “big ideas” for a representative government: **governing society is a complex process, successful democracies rely on responsible citizens, and government affects our life every day.** As they participated in daily discussions, listened to guest speakers, and proposed bills in mock committee hearings, their understanding around the concepts deepened. On Friday, they wrote about one of the big ideas to demonstrate the depth of their new knowledge.

Cut-off week moves bills closer to becoming laws

This week pages spent a lot of time on the floor of either the House of Representatives or the Senate delivering amendments or other documents to legislators who were under pressure to get bills passed. Pages got a first-hand look at how parliamentary procedure is used by legislators as they considered remaining bills. Hundreds of bills were introduced in the two chambers, but only about 15-20 percent will actually make it through the entire lawmaking process. In addition to handing out documents, pages were busy listening to their legislators express

their views and watching the voting process. For the rest of the session, all remaining bills will be debated on the chamber floor, sometimes late into the night. Bills which make it out of the second chamber will be sent to the Governor for her approval. The session is scheduled to end by March 11.

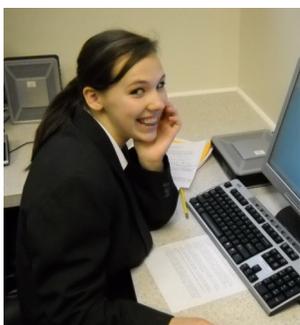
Sen. Baxter proposes legalization of marijuana to reduce deficit

Olympia—In an effort to balance the budget with measures that produce income without hurting citizens, yesterday Senator **Erasmus Baxter** introduced Senate Bill 5654. The bill would raise \$660 million over two years with the legalization and regulation of marijuana. “Anyone 21 years old or older would be able to possess and use pot,” said Sen. Baxter. In addition, a 6 percent excise tax would be added to the sales tax when marijuana is sold in government-controlled establishments, if this bill becomes law. “This would create jobs and boost the economy. The money put back into the economy would help us avoid future financial trouble,” said Sen. Baxter. According to the senator, an increase in public safety would result from police officers concentrating on more serious crimes.



Senators want cuts

Olympia—Yesterday the Senate Ways and Means committee convened to hear suggested remedies for the current budget deficit and finalize the package it recommends for a floor vote. Senators **Megan Johnson**, **Wynter Flournoy** and **Anja Green** proposed cutting health care coverage for undocumented immigrant children. This cut would save \$61 million per year. “This is a wise cut because health care is a privilege that is granted to American citizens. These children are not entitled to those privileges. This idea may encourage the families who are here illegally to move back to their own country,” said Sen. Johnson. “This free health care benefit encourages more illegal citizens



to move to Washington. It just cannot continue. If health care is something that they want, they can become citizens,” said Sen. Flournoy. “Taxpayers should not have to subsidize health care for somebody who isn’t even a citizen,” said Sen. Green. Senator **Shelby Gordon** was thinking in the same vein when she proposed deporting illegal alien offenders. “This would save taxpayers

\$9 million. We can no longer use our citizens’ money to pay for these offenders’ food, housing, and detainment,” she said. Others thought the government’s own spending should be curtailed. Senators **Sarabeth Mullins** and **Max Glass** proposed cutting overall state government from between 2 and 5 percent, saving \$400 million to \$1 billion. “This overall cut makes sense because it requires a relatively small sacrifice for each individual program, while having a large benefit to the state. This is preferable to completely cutting some programs while leaving others untouched, as all of the services originally provided by the

state would still be offered,” said Sen. Glass. “While departments like Human Services, Public Education, and Transportation offer many benefits to the citizens of our state, they run inefficiently. These cuts will assist agencies to cut unnecessary or obsolete programs that take up valuable money, like the Asparagus Commission,” said Sen. Mullins. Senators **Zach Campbell** and **Jasmin Karlous** proposed cutting government spending on goods and services by one fourth. “This is a good idea because we are using more technology these days, so we should be able to cut down on paper use,” said Sen. Karlous. “The Senate gets lunch for free, paid by taxpayers. That should end,” said Sen. Campbell. “The senators need to pay for their own lunch.” A joint House-Senate committee will meet later next week to finalize the budget before going on break in mid-March.



House conservatives feel there are more cuts needed to balance the budget

Olympia—On Thursday, the House Ways and Means Committee heard testimony from several members trying to pound out hard solutions to a serious budget shortfall. Representative **Casey Haber** proposed

deporting illegal alien offenders. This cut would save \$9 million. “Illegal immigrants are not suppose to be here anyway. If they break the law again by committing a crime, we should not be spending hard-earned taxpayer money on taking care of them in our jails and prisons,” said Rep. Haber. This rationale was also the one used by Representative **Benjamin L. Pratt**, who suggested eliminating health care coverage for undocumented immigrant children. “People should not be sneaking into the country and then taking advantage of free health



care,” he said. “It may seem harsh, but they should not benefit from something they didn’t work for,” said Rep. Pratt. Representative **Kristina Stevanovic** proposed cutting the funding for tourism marketing, which would save \$4.2 million. “With the economy being so bad and people not earning as much, traveling the U.S. or the world is not an option like it use to be. More people will be traveling within our state, so we really don’t need to be looking for more tourists. We can save this money by not advertising outside of the state. Maybe when the economy improves, we can reinstate the money to market our great state,” she said. Representative **Andrew Pratt** proposed cutting state government benefits for its workers by 5 percent, saving \$220 million. “Perhaps some employees would leave, but if their jobs weren’t filled, this would help our fiscal crisis even more,” he said. Representative **Sophie DeBolt** proposed postponing teacher raises. This cut would save \$390 million. “A raise is not an automatic benefit,” said Rep. DeBolt. “Most other jobs are not giving raises right now; teachers are going to have to shoulder some of the same burden as the rest of our state.



Teacher pay is already on a scale where they receive more pay for each year they teach, so they are still rewarded for their hard work.

We just can’t raise the scales right now with our bad economy,” she said. Representatives **Jenna Shamseldin**, **Myanna Harris**, and **Anna Mather** also had a suggestion to reduce spending at the government level. They proposed cutting goods and services by 25 percent. This cut would save \$200 million. “Why should the government keep spending like millionaires while the people are down to barely enough money to keep from starving,” said Rep. Harris. “There are a number of reasons that the state should make these cuts. First and most importantly, all residents have had to cut wasteful behaviors during the recent recession, and the government should have to mirror the suffering of the people, as well. Also, reusing and having limited supplies promotes overall efficiency, which in addition to cutting costs, also promotes environmental consciousness,” said Rep. Mather. “Legislators should be using the technology available and stop wasting paper when it is just as easy to read amend-

ments and bills online,” said Rep. Shamseldin. “And...no more steak and lobster in the dining rooms!” Finally Representative **Melissa Schmitz** suggested that the K-12 bilingual instruction programs should be cut. “This would save \$20 million. This is America and we speak English not Spanish or any other language. When you go to other countries, you have to speak their language. Immersion is the fastest way to learn a new language,” she said. House members are aiming to finalize their budget by this Friday so they have time to work with the Senate on working out last minute compromises.

Wealth, income, . . .and budgets

Focusing on fiscal issues during the week, House and Senate pages learned about how wealth is distributed in the United States, how wealth differs from income, and what it means to live within a budget. . .for both citizens and their government. Students took part in a “bean counting” activity where they became members of lower, middle or higher economic classes and were given beans to signify their wealth. Then, they had to give up beans to pay income tax, sales tax, rent/mortgage, utilities, food and other necessities. It became clear by the end of the simulation that there was very little discretionary income left in the lower or middle class. Finally, students used an electronic version of the “Ax and Tax” game to decide on real life cuts and/or revenues that faced legislators in 2009 in order to try to balance a budget with a \$6 billion deficit. In the culminating Thursday activity, students met as members of a mock Ways and Means committee to prioritize and decide on a final balanced budget.





Lending sources asked to give government a break

Olympia—Senate Bill 2366 was heard by the Ways and Means committee yesterday when Sen. **Shelby Rodriguez-Bartley** introduced the novel approach of asking lenders to postpone all loan payments and fees for the State of Washington for one year in an attempt to help balance the budget. “We stand a chance of saving \$3.6 billion if the institutions will agree to this option,” said Sen. Rodriguez-Bartley. “Hopefully, when the economy bounces back, we won’t have to borrow any more money and can make double payments to thank them for helping.”

Representatives call for some taxes

Olympia—Several ideas for raising taxes were proposed yesterday in the House Ways and Means committee meeting, where the final budget was finalized. After hours of negotiating, Representatives **Gus Wimberger, John Mendez, Rachel Farmer, and Jake Steiner** think their committee’s plan will go a long way towards balancing the budget. They propose a state income tax. “Everyone would pay one percent of their income, so it would be fair,” said Rep. Steiner. Rep. Mendez agrees. “The creation of a 1 percent income tax would affect all income groups equally. For the lower income group, they would pay approximately \$200 per year, while someone making \$500,000 would pay \$5,000 for the year,” he said. The tax is predicted to raise \$4.9 billion over



the next two years. “If this happens, the economy will turn around and the tax could either be lowered or completely cut,” he said. “When people are working and have a steady income, the government has a steady source of income. The median per capita income in the state is \$42,857, so a modest tax like this would cost approximately \$428 per year, or about \$36 per month,” said Rep. Farmer. “Receiving this revenue would mean that the state would not have to cut essential programs such as education, police, firefighters, and roads,” said Rep. Wimberger. After hours of negotiating, Representative **Kelley Wood** thinks her caucus’s plan will help balance the budget. The measure calls for a penny per liter tax on bottled water.

“Adding this tax will raise \$365 million. The tax will not harm citizens as bottled water is not a necessity, so those who don’t want to pay the tax can choose not to buy the water,” she said. The average tax on a bottle of water would be between 12 and 16 cents, if this proposal is accepted. Representative **Maddie Sullivan** was determined to convince her colleagues that a small temporary bump in sales tax, from 6.5 percent to 7 percent, would help the state recover from this recession. “We could raise \$1.15 billion with just a .5 percent increase,” she said. “The tax would be temporary so everyone would bear the burden for a year or two. Then we would lower the tax back to 6.5 percent.” Representative **Roemello Cash** proposed a 50 cent increase in the cigarette tax which would bring in \$106 million. “People will still continue to use tobacco products no matter how much the price goes up,” said Rep. Cash. “Representatives **Ker-**



issa Giraud and Sana Keira proposed a \$1 tax on all hard liquor, which would bring in \$59 million. “It’s not a priority, it’s a choice to drink alcohol,” said Rep. Giraud. “Liquor is not a necessity like food is. If you do not want to pay the extra tax, then don’t buy alcohol,” said Rep. Keira. A final suggestion from Representatives **Johannah Coleman, Keana Elliott and Bryanna Loughridge** was to tax soda five cents per can/bottle. “This will bring in \$277. Pop is not necessary to live and it can cause health problems,” said Rep. Coleman. “Soft drinks are too popular and having to pay an extra 5 cents is not going to prevent people who like pop from continuing to buy it,” said Rep. Elliott. “This is a good remedy because it would be a temporary tax and would go away when the deficit has been reduced and economic times are better,” said Rep. Loughridge. A few items in the House plan still need to be reconciled with the Senate before the final budget is voted on and sent to the Governor for her signature.

State doesn't need liquor monopoly

Olympia—Representative **Joshua Roe** introduced House Bill 1354 yesterday, claiming that the state doesn't need the huge monopoly on liquor. "Privatizing booze would raise \$110.8 million in revenue over a two year period," he said. Other states, like California, have been successful in moving hard liquor out of state sponsored stores and into grocery and drug stores. Washington should follow suit, according to the representative.



Some taxes are necessary, say senators

Olympia—Senators met yesterday with the Ways and Means Committee to try to solve the budget deficit problem. One idea for balancing the budget, proposed by Senators **Adam Ellner, Daniel Lee, Sami Sheffels, Sofia Kane and Daniel Cook,**



calls for a personal income tax. If approved, their plan will generate \$4.9 billion over the next two years.

"Unfortunately, during this terrible economic crisis, we are just

all going to have to suck it up and go on. We have the highest minimum wage in the country, and if other states have an income tax, we should be able to have a modest one, too," said Sen. Lee. "This tax is temporary, and it is a modest increase for a short amount of time. It will be equitable for all citizens," said Sen. Sheffels. Unlike most states, Washington State currently does not have a personal income tax. "This is the most prudent choice. The reasons are simple: the tax is a fair way to spread the burden we have," said Sen. Cook. "The rich would pay more and the poor would pay less, but still contribute," said Sen. Ellner. Senators

Taylor Deline and Celeste Wrye proposed a one cent per ounce tax on bottled water, which would bring in \$365 million of much needed revenue, according to the senators. "Buying



Mock House/Senate Page School Budget Proposal*

Proposals	Savings/ Revenues (in millions)
Bottled water tax – 1 cent per oz.	\$ 365.0
50 cent increase on cigarette tax	106.0
Create state income tax of 1%	2,450.0
5 cent tax on each 12 oz bottle/can soda	277.0
Add sales tax to gum/candy	28.0
Add \$1/liter tax to liquor	59.0
Cut all state government by 5 percent	1,000.0
Deport illegal immigrant offenders	9.0
Bump state sales tax from 6.5% to 7%	1,150.0
Privatize liquor stores	88.4
Cap tort claims to \$2 million	40.0
Legalize marijuana, tax and regulate sales	660.0
Accept federal stimulus money	1,500.0
Cut government goods/services by ¼	200.0
Cut personal bodyguards of Governor/Lt. Governor by 50 percent	1.3
Temporarily tax food 3.25% for 2 years	850.0
Ask lending institutions to postpone Government loan payments for 1 year	3,600.0
Eliminate health care for illegal children	61.0
Reduce supervision/release prisoners	69.0
Reduce state employee pay/benefits 5%	220.0
Legalize gambling	290.0
Add 25 cents/\$1,000 to property tax	472.0
GRAND TOTAL	\$13,495.7

*Students used data from 2009; deficit based on a \$6.06 billion prediction.

bottled water is a convenience that a lot of people like nowadays,” said Sen. Wrye. “It’s a good idea because 12 cents extra for a bottle of water is not something that many consumers will notice, but it has great benefits for our state. If it is a temporary tax, like I propose, it would go a long way to help our budget



crisis,” said Sen. Deline. Hoping not to rile his constituents, Senator **Nicholas Pace** suggested an increase in property taxes by only 25 cents per \$1,000 of home values. “I know it

might not be too popular, but the average price of a home in Washington is \$272,000. This increase will only cost an extra \$68 a year for an average home,” he said. The property tax increase would raise \$472 million. After hours of negotiating, Senators **Christian P. Sanchez, Ian Reich and Kennedy Simpson** think their plan will go a long way towards balancing the budget. The measure calls for 50 cents to be added to the

purchase of a pack of cigarettes and will generate \$106 million in revenue for the state. “This plan is going to work because those who are addicted to cigarettes smoke packages of cigarettes



every week and its going to be hard for them to quit,” said Sen. Simpson. “With all the known dangers associated with smoking, it might even encourage some to quit, which might help with health costs years from now,” said Sen. Sanchez. Although Washington State has one of the highest gas taxes in the nation, Senator **Sara O’Neill** proposed applying a sales tax on fuel. “This would bring in approximately \$708 million and greatly help our state in its attempt to balance the budget,” she said. “If the increase in fuel costs impacted the personal finances of some people, they may decide to purchase an electric vehicle, which would help our state’s environment and lessen its carbon footprint. These are tough times that call for tough decisions, and we are going to have to really tighten our belts for a bit longer,” said Sen. O’Neill.

Guest speakers visit Page School

Rep. Jamie Pedersen (D-43rd); First Gentleman Mike Gregoire, with First Dog Trooper; Debbie Austin, legislative assistant for Rep. Jan Angel (D-26th); and lobbyist Don Carlson joined the pages during classes on Wednesday. The speakers talked about what led them to their current positions and shared insightful information about their jobs, the political process, and current legislative issues. Pages were able to interact with these guests by asking questions and sharing their own views in response to the speaker’s questions.



Sen. Morehead advocates legalizing gambling

Olympia—Yesterday Senator **Casey Morehead** introduced Senate Bill 5617 which will legalize gambling in Washington State on non-Indian land. Currently slot machines are legal only on reservation land. With a budget deficit of nearly \$3 billion, the Legislature is desperately looking for money. Sen. Morehead likes this option. “It would potentially raise \$200 over the next two years,” she said. “Some states have already made this move, so why not follow in their path? People already gamble, so why not benefit from those earnings?”

Page School on the web The Page School has its own web site. You can find us at: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/PageSchool> This newsletter has been posted there.

