

19th District Report

2010 Legislative Session



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- Technology, Energy & Communications
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Dear Neighbors:

Thank you for your time reviewing our legislative dispatch today. Representing our Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Pacific, and Wahkiakum counties is a great honor. We consider ourselves very fortunate to make our homes in Raymond, Aberdeen, and Longview – and to have our families and friends in the surrounding coastal communities of southwestern Washington.

Today's newsletter covers a wide range of matters. Of course, no one is surprised that the budget hogs most of the media attention. The worldwide financial meltdown, predictably, claimed a spot high up on practically everybody's 2010 legislative agenda. Along with the

budget, we've also reviewed other topics that seized our energy in the state capital that were important to southwest Washington.

As always, feel free to get in touch with us anytime. Seeing you in person around the district is always really great, and your phone calls, letters, and e-mails are truly a big help in our work.

Very truly yours,

Brian Blake *Brian Hatfield* *Dean A. Takko*

Brian Blake

Brian Hatfield

Dean Takko

Spring 2010

Schools

We're on the lookout for ways to advance the way we do education

In the 2010 legislative session, we embraced a number of very practical education-reform proposals.

We continued building on the foundation constructed last year for school-funding reform. House Bill 2776, which was one of the top education bills passed this session, embarks on the first round of recommendations from the landmark Quality Education Council. This year's legislation works toward:

- * Making the school-funding process more "user-friendly" for citizens.
- * Reinforcing our commitment to smaller K-3 class sizes.
- * Providing more state funds to our school districts for maintenance and operation.
- * Strengthening the system of student-transportation funding.
- * Emphasizing practical, real-world reforms in how we manage school levies and pay teacher salaries.

Local levies are also addressed in House Bill 2893. Perhaps you remember reading or hearing about it last year when the Legislature temporarily suspended funding for Initiatives 728 and 732 – on an emergency basis – to help address the gargantuan budget and revenue crisis. This new measure allows districts to restore this funding when they're calculating their levies. Needed relief is also provided in the new policy through a temporary four-percent increase in the levy lid—and the provision of more funding for a mechanism called *levy equalization* for property-poor school districts.

Bolstering science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) instruction is another highlight of the work we've done this year in the education arena. The state Superintendent of Public Instruction, according to terms of House Bill 2621, can name up to three Washington high schools to serve as "lighthouse high schools."

Jobs

Economic development will always be an agenda topper

We had to go into a special session to get our budget work done, which has been as maddening a development as anything any of us has experienced, when it comes to Olympia.

But the story of the 2010 Legislature – besides the budget – must also note some good outcomes in job creation and economic development. Some work already done in previous years is starting to come into fruition. The Fort Canby development, for example, as well as highway-repaving work and some other projects are items from previous capital and transportation budgets.

The Washington Works Housing Act (House Bill 2753) is a huge investment aimed at helping moderate-income people live near their jobs.

This legislation directs our state Housing Finance Commission to emphasize the building of community capacity in work-force housing – with an eye toward creating thousands of new construction jobs. Then too, you can add the "multiplier" effect in which even more economic development spins off from that original investment.

House Bills 2676 and 2677 represent a win-win for job creation and conservation.

This legislation doubles – from 10 years to 20 years – the payback period for energy-conservation loans and water-conservation loans provided by public utilities. By tearing down the financial barriers to conservation projects, we're putting contractors back to work and construction workers back on the job.

No one knows better than our communities of coastal Washington that timber is a huge part of our state's history and economic future.

This year, we passed House Bill 2420 to help transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources (and keep in mind the fact that healthy timber harvests provide fuel for green-energy projects). Forestry should always be a huge part of our state's efforts to grow green jobs. The Department of Commerce and the Workforce Training and Education Coordination Board must work to remove barriers that are getting in the way of green jobs in forest-products businesses and other traditional industries.

The promotion of forest biomass as a source of alternative energy is stressed in House Bill 2481.

Biomass burning can provide a new source of energy – as well as improve forest health, reduce the risk of forest fires, and provide green jobs for our rural communities. The Department of Natural Resources must pursue contracts for providing a supply of forest biomass from lands managed by the department.

Our ports will put a bigger emphasis on job-training activities, according to terms of House Bill 2651.

Ports can do more in the way of job-placement programs, pre-apprenticeship training, and educational programs operated by a nonprofit organization.

Community facilities districts are emphasized in Senate Bill 6241.

Specific areas can form these districts to provide financing for facilities and improvements in the local and regional infrastructure. If a county, city, or town forms such a district, the community can finance the cost of the purchase, lease, construction, improvement, or rehabilitation of any facility with an estimated life of five years or longer.

The Jobs Act of 2010 contained in House Bill 2561 was the very first bill that came to the floor of the House of Representatives this session.

The legislation is designed to create thousands of construction jobs all over the state in projects repairing public schools and universities and making these facilities more energy-efficient. We save taxpayers \$190 million a year in energy costs, and we build safer, healthier schools for the kids. You'll weigh in at the ballot this Nov.

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Representative Brian Blake



What's ahead

The assorted issues that go through my committee every session all require our detailed review and attention. It's not unusual for several matters to outweigh the time and resources

needed to address them as quickly and thoroughly as we'd like. Believe me, I have plenty of work ahead!

Helping Small Forest Landowners

Family forest landowners represent about half of the state's 10 million acres of private forest land. When the Forest and Fish Agreement was signed, over a decade ago, small family forest landowners were disproportionately impacted because their operations tend to be lower in watersheds, where there's usually more fish and, therefore, more regulation. To offset part of their financial loss, the state was providing special technical assistance combined with funding. But those funds went on the chopping block last session.

This year we worked on creating incentive approaches to help these small family-forest landowners. Unfortunately, we didn't hammer out a compromise. I will continue investigating possible solutions during the interim.

Selective fisheries on the Columbia River

Many wild salmon populations native to the Columbia/Snake River systems are listed under the Endangered Species Act. A key element of their recovery is to ensure that hatchery fish are not present on their spawning grounds. One way to remove hatchery fish while protecting the wild fish is selective fishing; catching the hatchery fish and letting the wild fish go.

This session I introduced House Bill 2696 aimed at promoting the harvest of hatchery-origin fish and minimizing mortality to the endangered wild fish. But I decided the issue needs further discussion. During the interim I plan to pull together recreational and commercial fishing groups, state fishery-management agencies and tribal governments to work together on developing sustainable, selective commercial fisheries here in Washington state.

Significant Achievements

- Due to high volume and deep budget cuts, the backlog in water right application processing has grown dramatically. This session we worked on solutions. On April 1, the governor signed **E2SSB 6267**, which will make it easier for the Department of Ecology to process water rights by creating an alternative cost-reimbursement procedure that also expedites the process. Additionally, it establishes criteria for qualifying as a certified water right examiner, and creates a Water Rights Processing Account. This bill will greatly improve the process and make the water resources program more efficient.
- Washington has a rich history of agriculture and farmers bringing their goods directly to consumers. There are over 100 farmers' markets across the state providing local economic stimulus and supporting the well-being of our communities. But, like everyone else, they are struggling in this recession. I was glad to be one of the sponsors of **House Bill 2402**, which exempts farmers' markets from property taxes when the markets are hosted by non-profit organizations and churches. To qualify for this tax break, which will expire in 2020, the market operations are limited to 53 days per year.
- Currently, Washington produces 600,000 certified organic products, and the number keeps growing. To support farmers who want to shift from traditional agriculture to organic practices, I co-sponsored House Bill 2460, which continues the state program that assists farmers in complying with federal standards for organic produce certification. Since the program is voluntary and is supported by fees—which are not increased under this bill—there is no impact to the state's general fund.



Senator Brian Hatfield

Emergency Food Programs

More and more people in southwest Washington have needed food stamps and food banks to feed their families as the recession continues to take its toll on Washington families. There are a number of different emergency food programs run by the state, and this is why I sponsored Senate Bill 6341 to consolidate all these programs under the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

The effects of this legislation are two-fold: it addresses hunger and is another step in the march to more government efficiency. In this economic climate, promoting and protecting our food banks – and providing better access to those who need them – is critical.

Moving these programs from larger agencies to the state's Agriculture Department will help expedite the decision-making process and leave the state in a better position to gain full access to federal food assistance programs. With our emergency food programs under one roof, we can make the most of our efforts to help the families and individuals across Washington who need these services the most.

Manufacturing Jobs Tax Credit

Our manufacturing jobs are crucial to our local economy. We want to make sure companies in rural areas can continue to take part in a tax incentive program that is a proven job creator. The rural counties sales and use tax deferral program grants these companies a deferral of state sales and use taxes on qualified construction and equipment costs.

These are some of the biggest costs for companies, particularly new companies, and the program gives them the chance to focus on growing their business and hiring workers. This program was scheduled to expire this year, but we extended it another ten years to help aid job creation as we move toward economic recovery.

Ruckelshaus Center

Whether it's in Washington, D.C. or in Olympia, getting every side to agree on an issue can be pretty difficult. Landowners across the state know how difficult it can be to go through permitting and use approval processes, and how difficult resolving conflicts can prove.

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a joint venture between Washington State University and the University of Washington, was designed to bring everyone involved in land use conflicts together in one place. Full representation by the agricultural and environmental communities, counties and cities, state and tribal governments is key to solving problems and working together.

Another of my bills, SB 6520, gives some extra time for the center to continue its work toward an agreement among participating stakeholders that can be proposed during the 2011 Legislative session. The bill extends a deadline for cities and counties to review and revise critical area ordinances relating to agricultural activities.

E-911

Enhanced 911, or E-911, uses GPS in cell phones to transmit a caller's location to 911 operator so they can quickly direct responders. With many emergency systems still using 1960s technology, it's important that we invest now to ensure the safety of our families and friends.

We worked with law enforcement and the telecommunications industry to find a new way to fund these crucial upgrades by allowing a small increase on excise taxes for cell phones, land lines and new Voice-over technology to ensure our rural counties have the resources to upgrade our 911 services.

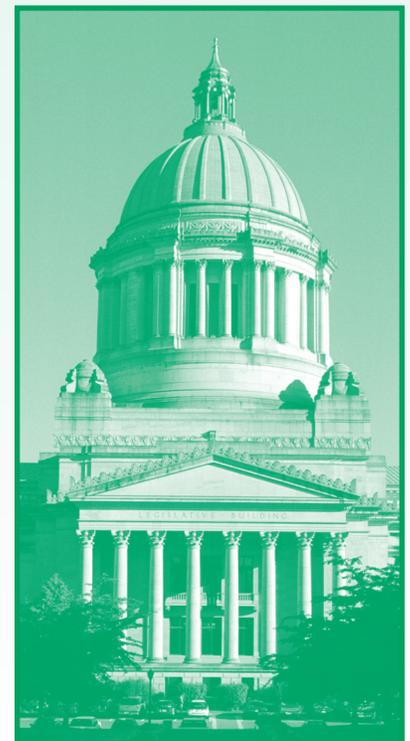
This important piece of public safety legislation would not have passed if Initiative 960 was not suspended. The two-thirds vote requirement would have prevented us from making this common-sense change to enhance public safety and stood in the way of helping our communities get the resources they need.

The "Roadkill" Caucus

There's an old political saying: "The only things you find in the middle of the road are yellow lines and dead skunks." Too often the extremes of our politics - on both sides of the aisle – end up calling the shots, leaving those of us in the middle feeling a little like roadkill.

This year I joined with several colleagues in the House and Senate to form the Roadkill Caucus. The caucus is a small group of moderate legislators who work with our leadership teams to moderate the Legislature's agenda.

Far too often it seems like the people heard the most in Olympia are those screaming the loudest at both ends of the political spectrum. We want to bring the voice of folks in the middle of the spectrum into the process as we work toward resolving our state's budget shortfall, and keep Washington moving forward.



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Representative Dean Takko



Timber industry: Key forestry bill focuses on jobs, conservation, revenue

I was proud to prime-sponsor a key timber bill this session. House Bill 2541 directs the Department of Natural Resources to write landowner-conservation proposals supporting forest landowners.

Many rural communities are dependent on a healthy forest-products industry, which is Washington's second largest manufacturing sector – providing nearly 45,000 direct jobs and almost 100,000 indirect jobs. But we've lost 16 pulp mills in the past five years, and we've seen thousands of workers thrown out of work. Mark Doumit,

Executive Director of the Washington Forest Protection Association, was kind enough to say recently that "we greatly appreciate Representative Takko's leadership on this legislation. He and other legislators recognize that in order for working forests to continue to protect our environment and provide tens of thousands of jobs in our state, we need to focus on ways to make owning forestland economically viable. The alternative is conversion and permanent loss of those lands."

Main Street program: Reinvigorating crucial work of a big economic-development tool

A program that's been nothing short of a sparkplug for revitalizing downtowns and commercial districts across Washington is on its way to getting a needed spark from the Legislature.

I prime-sponsored House Bill 2704 to transfer the Washington Main Street Program from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation.

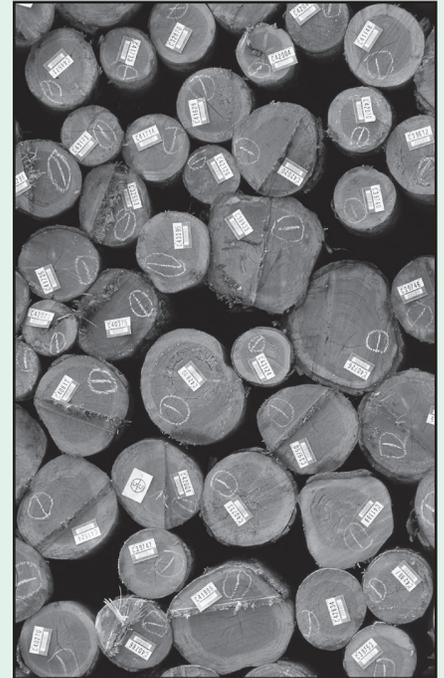
The Main Street Program has helped local communities create more than 11,000 jobs in 3,800 new and expanded businesses. It has leveraged private investment of \$413 million. Every dollar invested by the program has further leveraged an average of \$96 in private investment.

Consumer protection: Preventing hard-hit homeowners from suffering further financial ruin

I sponsored another bill to prevent further financial devastation from being visited upon families who've had their homes foreclosed for late payment of taxes and assessments.

House Bill 2428 deals with businesses who match specified unclaimed property held by counties, cities, and other municipalities with the owners of such property. The bill will prevent these businesses from charging a fee above five percent of the value of the property returned to the property owner. After foreclosure proceedings, counties often receive excess funds from the foreclosure sale that should by rights go to the former homeowners who've endured the foreclosure for delinquent payment of taxes and assessments.

The problem that has arisen is the fact that some unscrupulous bad actors set up businesses ostensibly helping a citizen identify those claims. These so-called businesses then charge outrageous fees for "helping" homeowners get what's rightfully theirs to get.



River dredging: Keeping Toutle, Cowlitz, and Coweeman clear of harmful buildups

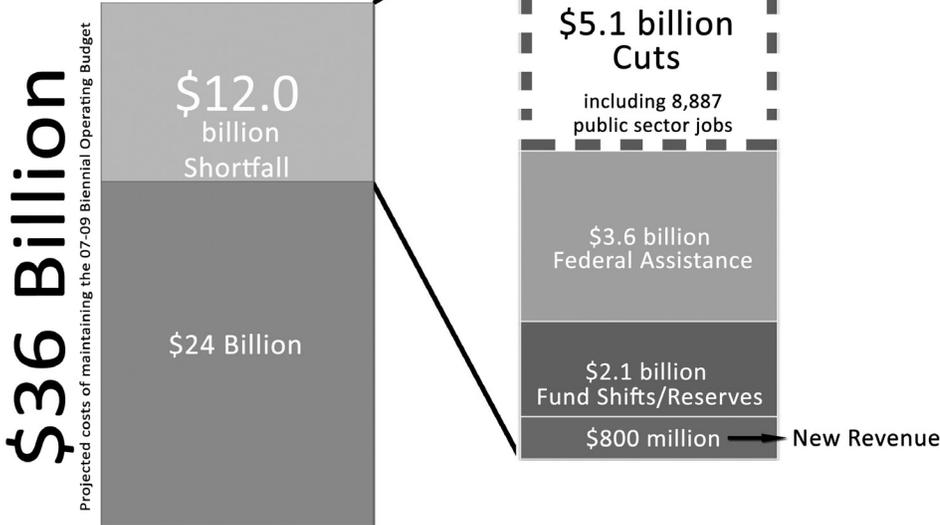
It's actually been 30 years since the eruption of Mt. St Helens! And yet to this day, Cowlitz County must still keep a wary eye out for any mischief from a sediment-clogged Cowlitz River.

We're always looking for strategies to keep the Toutle, Coweeman, and Cowlitz Rivers free flowing and flood-free. The sediment piles up in the rivers now that the sediment-retention dam is full, and nearly every year the rivers need to be dredged. With the sediment collected in the dredging process, it's no wonder that we're running out of places to put it.

My House Bill 2598 directs that any landowner who receives dredge material before the end of the year 2035 can sell it without paying compensation to the Department of Natural Resources.

This is certainly a public-safety issue in Cowlitz County – because if we let it go, we can expect flooding.

The 2009-2011 Operating Budget Solution



What cuts does the new revenue prevent?

The revenue package "buys back" cuts that were originally planned to help close the state budget shortfall.

Here are things we now do not have to cut:

- 16,000 children will keep their health care coverage through the state's Apple Health program.
- 60,000 low-income working adults will be able to stay on the state's Basic Health Plan rather than being uninsured.
- 12,000 students won't lose their state-funded college financial aid, allowing them to stay in school.
- 42,000 seniors and disabled adults will be able to remain in their homes rather than being forced into institutions.
- Class sizes for children in Kindergarten through 4th grade will not increase.
- 50,000 women with high-risk pregnancies won't lose crucial prenatal medical care.
- 2,600 dying patients across Washington won't lose their hospice care.
- Thousands of seniors will continue to receive nourishment through the Meals on Wheels program.

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