

35th District Report

From Your Legislators
Spring 2009



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- Environment, Water & Energy
- Transportation

Representative Kathy Haigh

- Education Appropriations, Chair
- Ways & Means

Representative Fred Finn

- Audit Review & Oversight
- Ecology & Parks
- Environmental Health
- Technology, Energy & Communications
- Transportation

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Legislative information

on the Internet: www.leg.wa.gov

Dear Neighbor:

Hello from your Washington State Legislature. It's an honor to serve you and other citizens who live in the Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason and Thurston County communities of our 35th Legislative District.

We're pleased to provide this brief report on our work so far in the 2009 session.

Although we're less than halfway through our work this year, the Senate and House have already sent several very significant bills to the Governor's desk. In one measure, we've taken an important first step toward answering our state's economic challenge. A second key budget bill streamlines state government, further reducing programs and services. Finally, a third measure that has cleared both chambers would strengthen unemployment benefits for working men and women in our hard-hit communities.

Thank you for reviewing our report today. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or comments about these or any other issues. Your participation in the legislative process makes it work better!

Best wishes,

Tim Sheldon
State Senator

Kathy Haigh
State Representative

Fred Finn
State Representative

Challenge: Stand up to a huge budget dilemma.

People in our towns and neighborhoods know all about tough times. No one knows better than the working people of our counties that we face an economic nightmare of epic proportions. That's just reality.

Yes, the worldwide financial predicament has chewed an \$8 billion (and counting) hole in our state's revenue standing. The new operating budget we eventually adopt in late April will certainly reflect deep cuts in state services and programs. But no, we shouldn't be wasting time grumbling about our problems. Instead, let's get



busy playing the hand we're dealt the best we can.

The Legislature, as we noted above, has sent the governor the year's first crucial budget-related measures. This House-originated legislation makes early cuts to the current operating budget as a strategy to save money in the upcoming new operating budget. Actually, it's unusual for the Legislature to take such a huge budget step this early in session. **The revenue chasm we face, however, demands that we get down to the business of solving the economic dilemma.**

Between now and June 30, this legislation will save hundreds of millions of dollars from the current budget. A big percentage of these budget savings would come out of programs in the state Department of Social and Health Services.

A Senate-initiated bill slashes more than four percent out of the administrative budgets for legislative and judicial agencies. This move reflects the governor's executive order for all state agencies. Further, the bill freezes salaries for exempt and management state employees, extends the hiring freeze, stops any equipment purchases over a thousand dollars, and freezes travel and training that isn't directly related to services.

Stimulus: Additional help for unemployed workers is the goal thus putting money into the hands of working people.

A fair and reasonable helping hand for working people is sought in another measure that we've also sent to the governor's desk. It's an economic-stimulus bill, plain and simple.

Additional help for unemployed workers would get real money into the hands of real people. The legislation strengthens the unemployment-insurance program, increasing unemployment benefits by \$45 a week. We also made a big, and very appropriate, change in eligibility for retraining programs. Honorably discharged veterans, disabled citizens, and low-wage workers could participate in the programs, according to terms of the legislation.

These extended benefits would send much-needed support to hard-hit workers and their communities. We know very well that folks who get this type of assistance put it right back into their local economy. For every dollar of unemployment help, at least \$1.60 goes straight to pay rent and utilities, and to buy groceries and other essentials.

This assistance is aimed at giving local families and local businesses a decent opportunity to navigate an indecent economy.



Unemployment: *What to do when you need to file a claim, or check on an existing claim.*

Many people have reported problems in recent months applying for unemployment benefits because the phone lines at the Employment Security Department have been clogged. The agency reduced its staff during Washington's very



low unemployment in 2007 and early 2008, which made good fiscal sense at the time. But now the workload has grown by 92 percent – and there haven't been enough trained staff at the department to deal with the rise in applications.

The department has been racing to train new agents, add phone lines, and expand its hours. Here are some tips for avoiding delays:

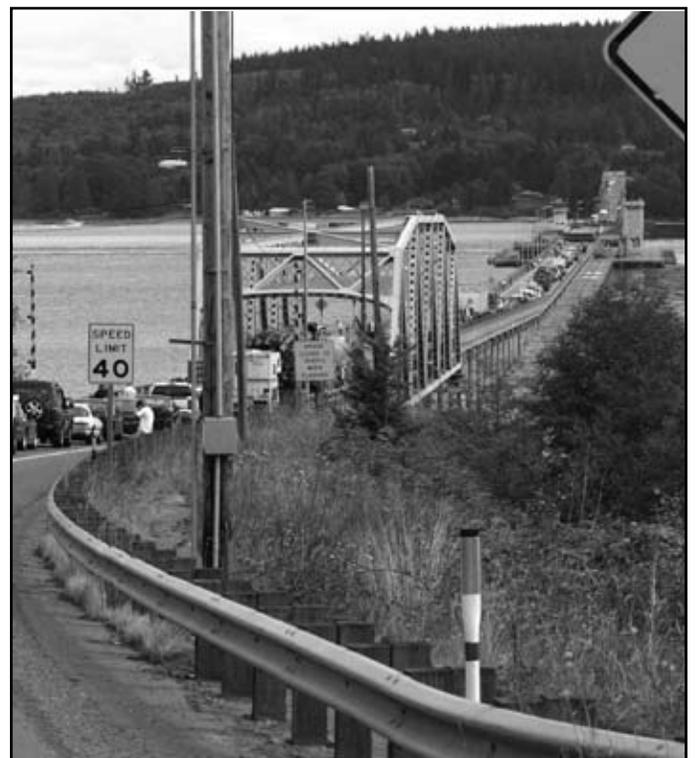
- Apply online at <http://www.esd.wa.gov/>.
- If you'd rather call, the toll-free number is 800-318-6022, and you should use a landline to avoid using up cell-phone minutes while waiting for an agent.
- Don't hang up, because redialing will put you at the end of the line.
- Provide complete and accurate employment information for the past two years. Inaccurate information will delay your benefits.
- Use the phone system's automated features to file a weekly claim, to reopen an existing claim, to check on a benefit payment, or to change your address.
- When you do get through, tell the agent the date that you first tried to call. Your claim will be backdated so you won't lose money because of the delay.

Hood Canal: *Friday, May 1, launches six weeks of needed work – be ready for large traffic volume on Highways 3, 101, and 106.*

Nothing is forever. The eastern half of the Hood Canal Bridge is nearing the end of its structural-service life. Because repairs wouldn't significantly extend the life of the bridge, rebuilding it has been deemed the most cost-effective solution.

When it's finished, the new Hood Canal Bridge will have a new and wider eastern half floating section. The bridge will also have new approach-sections and transition-trusses on its east and west ends. The west half of the bridge has been widened to make way for continuous eight-foot shoulders across the entire length of the span – matching the new east half and providing a safer bridge.

The Hood Canal Bridge will be closed for six weeks starting May 1. Here's the Hood Canal Bridge project Web site: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr104hoodcanalbridgeeast/>. You can also obtain weekly bridge updates by calling this toll-free project hotline: (877) 595-HCB2 (4222).



*As your legislators in Olympia,
we're here to help*

**Contact us if you need assistance with a state
agency, have a question or an idea for legislation.**

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