



Senator Randi

Becker

2nd Legislative District

December 2009

Stay in touch!

Please keep me informed of your ideas, concerns and community activities.

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Committees:

- Higher Education and Workforce Development (Ranking Republican)
- Agriculture and Rural Economic Development
- Health and Long-Term Care
- Transportation

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope this letter finds you and your family enjoying this beautiful Christmas season. The 2010 legislative session begins on January 11. It will be a challenging one, with the state now facing another massive budget shortfall. The Legislature will need to address this challenge, along with hopefully looking at ways we can help employers create jobs and get the economy moving again. Health care issues will likely be at the forefront too, as we watch what happens at the federal level and what our state's responsibilities will be as a result.

Thank you for the honor of representing you in the state Senate. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, I invite you to contact me. I also hope you will stop by and say hello if you are in Olympia during the legislative session. It's always nice to see people from home!

With warmest regards,

Senator Randi Becker

Want to stay updated on what's happening in Olympia?

During the legislative session I send regular e-mail updates to citizens all around our district. If you would like to be added to the update list please send me an e-mail at becker.randi@leg.wa.gov. I hope you will join!

Budget

When a family's income drops, it has a choice to make: cut back on spending accordingly, or keep on spending and take on debt. Faced with a similar situation, state government has chosen the second option. As a result, my fellow legislators and I will have a \$2.6 billion budget deficit to address when the Legislature convenes next month.

A few years ago our state was taking in an unprecedented amount of tax revenue thanks to the fast-growing real estate and construction sectors. Legislators responded by increasing the state's operating budget by more than 33 percent in less than four years. That kind of growth simply isn't sustainable. When the housing market began to cool, state government had larger financial commitments but not enough income to cover them.

This past year I was among a minority of lawmakers who cautioned that our state would be in serious trouble if we didn't bring spending down to match the lower level of revenue being collected. The majority chose to keep the spending level high, propping it up with more than \$3 billion in federal bailout money and another \$1 billion in money diverted from public construction projects and other funds.

How we solve this budget problem will directly affect whether the deficit in the 2011-13 biennium – and there will be a deficit – is larger or smaller.

The governor has said she can't support a budget that is balanced strictly with spending cuts, and has publicly committed to support higher taxes. Majority party leaders have said the same, so it's almost guaranteed the tax burden on our families, employers or both will be higher a year from now.

That's disappointing because I believe we should do everything possible to reform government – as in find ways to deliver government services more efficiently – before asking taxpayers for more money.

Washington families and employers are being forced to economize, to look at every opportunity for reducing costs. Yet the legislative majority has consistently passed up opportunities to adopt several significant money-saving reforms in areas like education, and social and health services, which account for a majority of state spending. Fortunately, those reforms are still available.

If we don't place a priority on reforms now, then we'll miss the opportunity to limit the shortfall in the next biennium by making government more efficient long-term.

Health Care

It is still unclear what legislation will ultimately be adopted at the federal level, but **the states will likely have two major obligations:**

- 1. Help pay for the expansion of Medicaid** – While the federal government will likely pay much of the cost for the expansion, the state will pay an increasing share starting with the 2014 launch date. There is no guarantee how much the federal government will contribute in successive years. Nearly 400,000 additional Washington residents could be forced onto a subpar Medicaid program that underpays doctors and causes severe access-to-care issues.
- 2. Implement an insurance exchange** – The exchange would offer uninsured individuals and groups their choice of private insurance plans within an organized marketplace. Some in Congress are pushing to include a public option in the exchange, and individual states may be allowed to opt-out.

Basic Health Plan

Because of Washington's \$2.6 billion deficit, there will likely be more cuts to the state's Basic Health Plan (BHP) for the working poor. The General Assistance-Unemployable (GA-U) program for the temporarily unemployed may also face cuts or total elimination.

The BHP has already cut coverage for nearly 40,000 enrollees to achieve the \$250 million savings assumed in the 2009-11 budget.

Public Safety

These past two months have been tragic ones for Washington's law enforcement community. Seven police officers, six of them from Pierce County, were ambushed and shot while in uniform. It is paramount that the Legislature remain committed to public safety. This past year there were some ill-advised budget decisions which will have a negative effect on public safety. It was only three years ago that lawmakers approved landmark prison and supervision reform legislation containing a clear message to both citizens and offenders: We intend to hold people coming out of prison more accountable for their actions. I am committed to working with my fellow legislators to make sure that we do everything possible to prevent tragedies like these police officer shootings from happening. During a time in which we are still looking to make spending reductions, there should be no sacrifice of public safety.

Focusing on our Economy

Washington's unemployment rate is 9.3 percent and could climb even higher next year. I believe a top priority for the 2010 legislative session should be to protect the jobs already in Washington and make our state more attractive to new employers. The Department of Labor and Industries has announced a \$117 million workers' compensation tax increase for 2010. Adding higher taxes onto employers who are already struggling could cause them to eliminate even more jobs or even go out of business. I am hopeful the Legislature will seriously consider major cost-saving reforms to our workers' compensation system in the upcoming session.

Please stay in touch!

Your comments and concerns are always appreciated. Please take a moment to tell me what's on your mind. Then detach this section and insert into an envelope and mail.

Dear Randi,

Name: _____ Phone Number _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Please send me your e-mail updates!

Return To:

Senator Randi Becker

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