



Senator Don BENTON



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Standing committees:

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Insurance, *Ranking Republican Member*
- Government Operations & Elections
- Transportation

Dear Neighbor:

As the 2009 session gets underway, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for returning me to the Washington State Senate to represent you and the interests of Clark County. I appreciate your faith in me and ask that you share your thoughts and concerns with me on the issues we will be considering this year. This is very important to me as your state senator. When I can testify in committee or speak in the Senate chambers about the very real impacts of proposed legislation on senior citizens, families and businesses, it makes the message stronger. **I am honored** to be your voice in Olympia and very much appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Senator Don Benton

The overriding issue for the 2009 Legislature will be the \$6 billion deficit

Before I get into the specifics of how we should fix this problem, let me first point out that **this deficit is not a revenue shortfall.**

- The state's general fund revenue for the next biennium (2009-11) is projected to be **\$1.5 billion more than the current biennium.**

The deficit is the result of overspending. Spending has increased by 33 percent since 2005. It is has always been way out of line with revenue projections.

Because the national recession will likely deepen, there will be no upswing in the economy for a long time. In other words, the state will not have enough money to support the current spending level for several years. It is hard to estimate how long.

Fixing the Budget

There are **two steps** we should take to solve this problem: **First**, we should quickly adopt a supplemental budget that significantly cuts spending for the last six months of the current biennium. This will ensure state government does not run out of money before the new 2009-11 budget takes effect July 1, 2009. Saving money now, through policy changes that eliminate spending, will produce greater savings in the next biennium because program costs won't compound and grow over time.

Second, build the 2009-11 budget using these three principles:

1. **Protect services for the most vulnerable**, even if it means sacrifices in other popular areas of the budget. For example, it's more important to preserve services

for the most needy and those with no income rather than to give pay raises to those who already have jobs.

2. **Do not increase taxes and do not pass the buck to voters** by asking them to approve a tax increase and do not hide new taxes as "fee increases." So far, the Democrat majority in the Legislature has not gone along with the governor's "no new taxes" pledge – but they should. Higher taxes will further hurt our economy, and taxpayers should not have to bail out state government's poor budgeting decisions.
3. **Adopt a budget that is transparent and sustainable.** Do not balance it using one-time money from pension raids, selling off the state's tobacco settlement, or other gimmicks that would only make future budget problems worse – and do not slash popular services first to make a case for tax or fee increases. Policy changes made to reduce spending need to be sustainable in future biennia.

Making child killers face the death penalty

Crimes subject to the death penalty in Washington are defined as aggravated first-degree murder and are enumerated in the state's criminal code. Among the crimes listed are killing a law enforcement officer or firefighter in the line of duty, killing a news reporter to suppress a story, killing someone for membership in an identifiable group, and being paid to kill someone.

Killing a child is one of the worst crimes imaginable and should be defined as aggravated first-degree murder. Without this designation, prosecutors have to jump

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through hoops to prove this despicable crime falls in the category of “aggravated.” It should just be the law.

I first introduced a bill to make child killers subject to the death penalty in 2006. I will file this bill again this year. This issue is a priority for me. Like the Chelsea Harrison Act, which became law in 2008 after I pushed hard for its passage during several sessions, murder of a child will stay on my agenda until it becomes law.

Columbia River Crossing

My position on solving the I-5 bottleneck from Vancouver to Portland continues to be distorted in the news media. I am not against a solution; I am against the current proposal that will not solve the problem. So far, Washington has spent \$60 million dollars – wasted \$60 million – on a plan to build a new bridge that will not increase capacity and will not help commuters.

Replacing the bridge will not solve congestion, nor will it significantly improve freight mobility. With the forecast of six-mile backups lasting 14 hours per day made by David Evans and Associates done for the CRC in 2005, I think the idea of just replacing the bridge is unbelievable. Nearly one-third of these commuters live in Clark County – and Vancouver continues to grow, having more than doubled its population since 1995.

Even with the planned correction of the bottleneck at Delta Park, there are no additional thru-lanes planned, which would mean that cars and trucks will still crawl over the river, waste fuel and spew carbon monoxide, and drivers will be charged a toll to do it.

I have been a champion of transportation projects for all of Clark County, not just my legislative district, throughout my 14 years in the Legislature. I have gone to bat for important transportation projects that bring great benefit to the entire county and region and will continue to do so. I simply cannot condone or support wasting precious resources on proposals that will not increase capacity or reduce congestion. I call on other community and government leaders to join me in my opposition to this horrendous waste of public resources and join forces to promote a real congestion relief plan that will include a new corridor and a third bridge across the Columbia River.

The underlying cause of congestion on Interstate 5 is a corridor issue, not a bridge issue. A replacement bridge will not solve that long-term problem. We need a real solution, not just a place to put light rail which even proponents admit will not move more than 2 percent of trips daily.

Legislative Updates

During legislative sessions, I use my **Benton Bulletin** to provide updates on legislative action. If you would like to receive a copy either by regular mail or by e-mail, let me know. You can send me your mailing address or request an e-mail copy by e-mailing me at Benton.Don@leg.wa.gov or by calling my office at (360) 786-7632, the toll free legislative hot line at 1-800-562-6000, or by writing to me at 109-B, Irv Newhouse Building, Olympia, WA 98504-0417. **Please keep in touch.**

“All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

~ Washington State Constitution, Article 1, Section 1