

Washington State Senator
33rd Legislative District

Senator KAREN KEISER

2009 End Of Session Newsletter



How to contact me

I appreciate your letters, calls and e-mails on legislative issues. Please let me know if I can help you with matters before state agencies, too.

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Committees:

- Health & Long-Term Care (chair)
- Labor, Commerce, Research & Development (vice chair)
- Ways & Means



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Most observers called the 2009 legislative session the most difficult since the Great Depression. We cut nearly \$4 billion out of state services to balance the budget, but it comes at an enormous cost to some of our state's most vulnerable citizens, public schools and colleges and universities.

Tens of thousands of working Washingtonians will be removed from the state's Basic Health Plan, some nursing homes may close, adult day health services will be severely reduced, thousands of teachers and state workers will be laid off and thousands of higher education enrollment slots will be eliminated.

I didn't come to Olympia to reduce services to our citizens, but the unprecedented economic crisis hitting our state and nation left us with few options. We were fortunate to receive nearly \$3 billion in federal stimulus funds to help us hold on to vital services. We found no substantial support in the public or in the Legislature for any significant new revenue.

This newsletter is a report on this challenging session. I tried my best to avoid long-term damage to education and health care by carefully considering every decision. If the economy rebounds in the next few months, it is my sincere hope that we can undo some of the damage.

As always, I welcome your comments and questions.

Always,

Karen

Grim Budget Decisions Made

Normally we enter the legislative session looking for ways to improve life for people across Washington. This year we had no choice but to cut deeply into existing public services. There were no easy choices, and no winners.

Our strategy was three-fold:

- Identify and spare the people least able to withstand cuts in services and basic programs;
- Avoid counterproductive cuts that might save money in the short term but lead to greater costs in the long term; and
- Be as innovative as possible in finding ways to cut spending that minimized cuts in services.

Our operating budget totals \$31.4 billion.

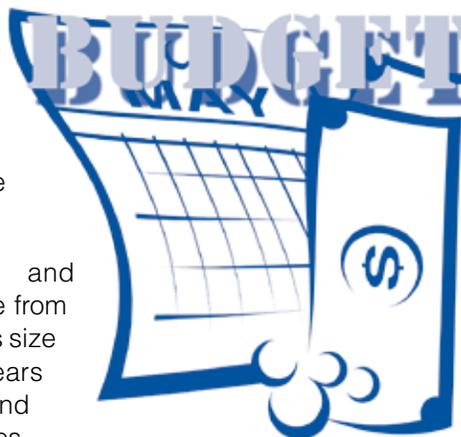
Education Faces Fewest Cuts

Because funding basic public education is our paramount constitutional duty, cuts to K-12 public schools were much smaller than other areas. The average district funding cut ranges from .1% up to about 4.8 percent. The state average cut is 2.2 percent.

After factoring in federal stimulus dollars, education funding was reduced by \$794 million. This brings total spending for K-12 education to \$13.4 billion for the next two years — nearly 43 percent of the operating budget.

The most difficult and controversial cuts came from suspending I-732 (class size reduction) for two years to save \$353 million and I-728 (cost of living raises for teachers) which was reduced by \$600 million.

Colleges and universities will be allowed to raise tuition 14 percent a year at four year schools and up to 7 percent at community colleges. The budget also eliminates 9,028 enrollment openings for new students. To compensate for the tuition increases, we increased financial aid for students.



Health Care Cuts Hurt

- √ More than 100,000 Washingtonians are enrolled in the Basic Health Plan for working families. Our unprecedented revenue shortfall required us to reduce funding by 42 percent to save \$255 million.
- √ We were able to pass legislation to apply for federal matching funds that, if granted, will restore funding to cover around 100,000 people. However, federal approval is not a sure thing.
- √ The General Assistance Unemployable (GA-U) program also suffered big cuts. GA-U serves about 16,000 people who, due to a disability, are unable to work. The GA-U cash assistance program was reduced by \$18.6 million, and GA-U medical was reduced by \$37 million. We proposed a managed care approach to keep these clients healthy and progressing out of the program.
- √ Sadly, dozens of other health care services will be slashed, taking tens of millions of dollars from long term care, mental health and developmental disabilities programs.
- √ The Adult Day Health program will be limited to people who live in their own homes.

State Parks Saved

Saltwater State Park will stay open through a voluntary opt out vehicle registration program. If too many people opt out of paying the \$5 fee each year, state parks will be closed.

A Foundation for Real Health Reform

I am thrilled to report that we built a solid foundation for health reform in our state. I sponsored three key pieces of legislation to set the stage for real change.

Washington Health Partnership

Under this bill, the state will be able to apply for a federal waiver to maximize federal funding for the Basic Health Plan and family planning services. The waiver is important because it could mitigate severe cuts to the Basic Health Program. (SB 5945)

Health Efficiency Act

Out of control health care costs are a major threat to our economy. Administrative costs currently take at least one-third of every health care dollar. My bill will standardize health administration and cut duplication and waste. The legislation will simplify the health care system and bring down health care inflation. (SB 5346)

Secure Health Information Exchange

Electronic medical records are another way to reduce costs and medical errors. This bill builds on our state's relatively good progress on electronic medical records and creates a secure exchange so basic information about lab results, prescriptions, allergies and immunizations are available electronically. (SB 5501)

One other piece of good news about health care is the success of our Cover All Kids policy. We have achieved more than 96% coverage for kids in low income families, and we have extended coverage to middle income families who will be able to buy into our Apple Health for Kids insurance plan.

We passed several other health care bills that were important to specific groups—genetic counselors, dental hygienists and speech therapists. We also passed bills to protect seniors and other vulnerable populations in long term care. For a complete list of health care bills passed into law this year, just log onto <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/> and click on the bills by topic link.

There ought to be a Law!

One of my most satisfying jobs is advocating for the citizens and businesses in the 33rd district. Here are my top four bills that passed.

1. With the horrible economy and the abrupt closure of Burien's BBC Dodge and Burien Nissan, I was eager to help our local auto dealers. I sponsored Senate Bill 5595, the Franchise Termination Fairness Act, to give local dealers the same rights manufacturers have regarding inventory and equipment buyback. The legislation was one of the first bills signed into law this session.
2. When John Scanlon in Kent found out he needed a heart transplant he was worried about lots of things, but not his health insurance coverage. His employer's policy was the best available. But he soon discovered that even good insurance doesn't cover full organ transplant costs. The cap on transplants had been set at \$250,000 in 1983 by all insurance plans in our state. Transplants now average about \$350,000 and can go much higher. Senate Bill 5725 increases the coverage to at least \$350,000, and it separates the short duration of transplant hospital treatment from the chronic care transplant patients must maintain to have success.



John Scanlon and Governor Gregoire at bill signing
May 14, 2009

3. The beer business seems healthy even in a recession, but at the manufacturer's level the brewery industry has changed a lot in the last couple of years. The Kent Valley is home to many large local beer distributors who have contracts with specific brands. With mergers, buyouts and consolidations of national and international brands, the local distributors' rights to brands have been threatened. Senate Bill 5403/House Bill 1441 gives local distributors successor rights if a brand is terminated or not renewed.
4. Like a lot of people struggling to make ends meet, Brenda McFall worked two jobs a part time job for a major retailer and a full-time job for a travel agency. She quit her part-time job only to be laid off from her full-time job. She was denied unemployment benefits because she had voluntarily quit her part-time job. I sponsored Senate Bill 5804 so that workers facing the same situation will not be denied benefits if they are laid off. It was a pleasure meeting her when she came to Olympia for the bill signing.



Brenda McFall and Governor Gregoire at bill signing
April 28, 2009

Flood Protection for Kent Valley Funded

One of the major construction projects the Legislature funded is the Horseshoe Bend Levee repair project on the Green River near downtown Kent. We secured \$10 million for the project to help protect our communities from floods. Engineers have detected a depression in the Howard Hanson Dam that prevents them from filling it to capacity. During the next serious rain, all the water will flow into the Green River. Water flowing over the levees like Horseshoe Bend could create a catastrophic event for communities from Kent to Tukwila.

New District Office

I want to announce the opening of my new district office in Des Moines. It is located at:

22525 Marine View Dr. S
Suite 206
Des Moines, WA 98198
206-878-2748 Office

I will be working out of this office during the interim and will be able to meet with local constituents to discuss their concerns.

I am to honored represent the 33rd District of Washington. If I can be of any assistance, Please contact me at (360) 786-7664 or via email at keiser.karen@leg.wa.gov or visit my Web site at <http://www.sdc.wa.gov/senators/keiser/>

Truth in Music

Imposter music groups are a growing problem in Washington. I've heard too many horror stories about people buying concert tickets only to find out no members of the original group are performing. This cheats the real performers out of work and damages their brand name with the public. With the help of the real Jon "Bowzer" Bauman – former bass singer for the group Sha Na Na – we passed Senate Bill 5284 to require concert promoters to tell the truth or face the consequences, including a substantial fine. This consumer protection bill brought a little levity to this otherwise grim session. Sometimes you just have to smile.



Sen. Keiser and Jon "Bowzer" Bauman after public hearing for Truth in Music Advertising legislation in February.