

Senator Val Stevens

39th Legislative District

Legislative Report • July 2010



Senator Val Stevens

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Committees:

- Higher Education and Workforce Development
- Human Services and Corrections
- Natural Resources, Ocean and Recreation
- Rules

National Organizations: Member of the Board of Directors of the American Legislative Exchange Council, an organization whose mission is to advance the Jeffersonian principles of free markets, limited government, federalism and individual liberty among America's state legislators.

Dear Friends,

In 2009, Democrat budget writers ignored the forecasts of a bad economy and passed a completely unsustainable two-year budget. As a result, this year's supplemental budget had to be radically adjusted to accommodate their irresponsible spending.

When the dust cleared after not only the 60-day regular session, but a 30-day overtime session, our citizens were saddled with nearly \$800 million in new taxes. Instead of cutting back and simply funding necessary services, the Democrat majority passed the largest operating budget tax increase in state history. Our warnings and offers of help were ignored. We will all suffer the effects of that lack of cooperation.

The new taxes – about \$2.5 billion over three years – will drain Washington businesses just when they're trying to hold onto employees. They will cost us jobs and further reduce the revenue stream necessary to maintain a balanced state budget.

But there is some good news. The Legislature passed into law my bill to fight child sex trafficking. I'm hopeful it will save countless children by leveling severe penalties on the unscrupulous people who buy and sell them.

Another victory went to thousands of citizens who teamed to stop one bill designed to weaken our freedom of speech and another that targeted our right to bear arms. I've detailed these bills in this newsletter. I am so proud of the courageous citizens who came to the Capitol to testify and protest these bills.

As always, it's an honor and a joy to serve you in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Val Stevens

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NEW STATE TAXES BITE CONSUMERS, SERVICE BUSINESSES

When majority Democrats voted to end Initiative 960's two-thirds vote requirement for the Legislature to pass taxes, it allowed them to levy taxes all by themselves – without having to even consult Republicans.

An additional insult occurred when they repealed I-960's transparency provisions, which required the state to notify interested taxpayers by e-mail about any new tax increases. Those e-mails cost nothing, yet they were terminated – along with the requirement to notify taxpayers via the state voters' pamphlet of the cost of tax increases and the voting record of each legislator.

More taxes, fewer jobs

The new *tax increase on service-related businesses* affects most of our state's entrepreneurs. They will now see a 20 percent jump in their business and occupation tax rate, netting the state an estimated \$246 million more next year.

Consumers got hit at the checkout stand: a dollar-a-pack hike in the tax on cigarettes, an additional 2 cents-per-can tax on soda, an additional tax on major-brand beer that raises the cost by about 5 cents per can, and a new sales tax on bottled water, candy and gum.

The beer, pop and bottled water taxes are supposed to be temporary. In my 18 years in the Legislature, I have never seen a tax that was truly temporary. Just days after announcing the "temporary" tax on bottled water, House Democrats introduced a bill to make the tax permanent in order to help pay for \$505 million in bonds to finance "energy efficiency" improvements to public school and college campus buildings.

This measure would obligate Washington taxpayers for 25 years to pay off bonds that "create jobs" for only 18 months. Energy saved? Statistics show that so-called "green" schools use as much – or more – energy than regular schools. Even worse: Supporters of this bond scheme (which would take us over the state's constitutional debt limit) are claiming it would make schools safer, when there isn't a single safety requirement in the bill. That's what folks call "bait and switch."

Where's the reform?

Concerned legislators opposed to tax hikes offered dozens of creative ideas that would have saved taxpayers billions of dollars. We could have reopened *collective bargaining agreements* with state employees. Current agreements will be in effect through the middle of 2011. They give 40 percent of unionized state employees a pay raise and keep each employee's share of health benefits at only 12 percent. (Private sector workers pay 20 to 25 percent.)

We also could have reformed *K-12 education financing*, called for competitive contracting to ensure state services are provided cost-effectively, and created a B&O tax exemption for new businesses to jump-start growth and get revenues flowing again.



One of the bright lights of session: Sen. Val Stevens, friends and supporters watch as the governor signs Stevens' bill to dramatically increase penalties for anyone who recruits, sells, transports or purchases underage children for sexual purposes.

Instead of cost-cutting reforms, the Democrat ruling party actually managed to increase state spending in spite of a crippling economic recession. The 2010 supplemental budget grew by \$1.6 billion – from last year's budget of \$58.7 billion to \$60.3 billion for 2009-2010.

Next year? Expect worse.

While these new taxes will fill the 2010 budget hole, it's just a temporary fix. *Next year, the deficit will be even worse – an estimated \$4.7 billion.* That's because the state has neglected many of its financial obligations while creating new ones.

For example, next year the state has promised to pay for: lower class sizes (Initiative-728), several years of delayed pension costs, skipped teacher raises (I-732) and homecare worker training (I-1029). Total cost due: Almost \$1.8 billion.

On top of that liberal Democrats have raised taxes to: fund K-12 at a higher level, give more to levy equalization, pay for unsustainable health care benefits for state workers, restore a rate cut to hospitals, and increase the number of children covered in the Early Learning program. Cost of these items: Just over \$1 billion.

Finally, there was no consideration whatsoever for the possibility that the state might not get the federal aid money for Medicaid next year. Cost of this lost funding: \$480 million.

It's no wonder that the governor is threatening another special session before January to deal with the financial consequences of this out-of-control spending.

ARE STATE OFFICIALS IGNORING THE CONSTITUTION?

In February, when Attorney General Rob McKenna announced he had grave concerns about the constitutionality of the Obama health care plan passed by Congress, Gov. Gregoire and the Democrat leadership in Olympia became downright livid. When he joined a lawsuit to fight for the constitution, they attempted to block him from using state money in that effort.



That should worry you.

It's McKenna's duty to defend the U.S. and Washington constitutions and to protect citizens when their rights are at risk. In fact, every state official has sworn to preserve our Tenth Amendment rights, yet our own governor not only refuses to join him, she places obstacles in his path.

Under the Tenth Amendment, the federal government has no authority to compel private citizens to purchase anything. However, the new health care law forces individuals and businesses to purchase insurance or face fines and penalties. Can the federal government force people to enter into a contractual relationship under threat of punishment? Contract law is based on mutual agreement, free of duress.



Can the Interstate Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution be used to force private citizens to purchase a commercial product (insurance), even though refusal to purchase a product is an absence of commerce and doesn't involve crossing state lines?

Anticipating these questions back in January, I co-sponsored legislation to guarantee you protection against unconstitutional laws. *Senate Bill 6535, the Washington State Health Care Freedom Act*, would have protected employers and workers who refuse to participate in nationalized healthcare from possible fines and penalties. It would also nullify in Washington any federal law, rule, order or other act by the federal government violating the provisions of the bill. As a companion, I also introduced Senate Joint Memorial 8220, which, if approved by voters, would have added the same protections to our state Constitution.

Democrats refused to give either measure a hearing.



NEW LAW FIGHTS CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING

Sadly, the explosion of child pornography on the Internet has skyrocketed the demand for sex with minors and sexual materials featuring children. As a result, children and young teens are being kidnapped and forced to perform for money under threat of death.



As unbelievable as this may sound, it is happening in virtually every country and every state in the union, including at least five cities in Washington. An estimated 300 to 500 children are for sale in Seattle and other Washington cities.

Severe penalties for sex trafficking

In an attempt to stem the tide of child sex trafficking in Washington, I introduced a bill to help rescue these exploited children and severely punish those who take their innocence. Senate Bill 6476 was passed by the Legislature this year. It took effect June 10 and dramatically increases penalties for recruiting, selling, transporting or purchasing underage children for sexual purposes.

Commercial sex abuse of a minor ("pimping") is now a Class A felony, carrying a 7- to 26-year prison sentence and a maximum \$5,000 fine. It has been a Class B felony, carrying a minimum sentence of just 1.75 years. Also, commercial sex abuse of a minor (buying) has been elevated from a Class C felony with a \$550 fine to a Class B felony, with up to a 12-year sentence and an additional \$5,000 fine.

The new law also provides these exploited children with a safe haven, where they can be helped out of bondage and into a new life.

LIBERTY WATCH

Your freedom at risk

Senate Bill 6452 – Abortion agencies try to shut down faith-run pregnancy centers



Early this year a dangerous new bill was introduced in the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee. Senate Bill 6452 was a direct attack on Washington's faith-run Pregnancy Resource Centers by pro-abortion advocates diametrically opposed to their cause. The bill was an out-and-out assault

on both freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

SB 6452 would have required Pregnancy Resource Centers to submit to a series of state regulations that would completely undermine its mission and halt the efforts of religious organizations to encourage women to choose an alternative to abortion. It would also have made the PRCs subject to the Consumer Protection Act, allowing one successful lawsuit to close down the centers.

Although we managed to thwart the bill this year, I expect it to surface again in 2011.

Senate Bill 6396 – Assault weapons ban shot down by you!

This year Senate Bill 6396, a state ban on assault weapons, was introduced. It was a clear violation of our Second Amendment rights. The original bill even allowed searches of gun owners' homes.

Hundreds of citizens packed the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing room. The overflow crowd jammed a large conference room down the hall, watching the hearing on television. These citizens came to Olympia to oppose the bill and thousands more called and e-mailed legislators. The effort paid off, and the bill was not brought up for vote. The search provisions were removed from the bill just before the hearing began.

Because of so much opposition, this bill was stopped in its tracks, but its proponents are vocal, powerful and determined. We must always be ready to defend this right.

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