



SENATOR

Kevin Ranker

40th Legislative District • San Juan Island

June 2009



Dear Neighbors,

On April 26 we adjourned the 2009 legislative session, my first as your state senator. I came to this legislative session with several priorities – a few pieces of legislation, an intense focus on the transportation budget – particularly ferries and other key issues in Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan Counties, and a complete dedication to reforming and improving our state educational system.

To balance our budget we had to overcome a \$9 billion budget shortfall – one of the most strenuous and difficult budget tasks ever handed to a legislature in our state. We used this moment in history to reevaluate a lot of things in Olympia, everything from our educational system to prisons to health care. However, the cuts that were made are significant and will have impacts in each of our communities.

While the budget overwhelmed every discussion, we did take some major steps forward for the people of Washington this session. We broke new ground in education reform, increased benefits for unemployed workers, and provided protection of our waters from oil spills. In a time of economic upheaval, we're moving forward as a state, working hard for middle-class families and investing in our future.

In this newsletter, I outline some of the key investments coming to our communities, and the difficulties that we're facing as we move towards economic recovery. As always if you need more information, please call my office or check out my website and sign up for my e-mail updates.

Sincerely,

Sen. Kevin Ranker
40th Legislative District

Please Keep in Touch

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Senate Committees

Agriculture & Rural
Economic Development (Vice Chair)
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (Vice Chair)
Environment, Water & Energy
Transportation

INSIDE



- Neah Bay Tug
- State Government Climate Leadership
- Lake Whatcom
- Scenic Byway Ferry Route
- Domestic Partnerships
- Education
- Transportation
- The State Operating Budget
- Investing in our Communities



LEGISLATION

I'm excited to report that during this session we were able to secure passage of most of my top priority bills and several other pieces of legislation that I co-sponsored. Here are some of the highlights:



Neah Bay Tug – Senate Bill 5344

We've seen the risks of oil spills for decades. For twelve years at the state and federal level, we have attempted to develop a sustainable funding mechanism for the Neah Bay Rescue Tug – recognizing that it is the first and best defense to an Exxon Valdez-type disaster in our precious waters. Now, with this new law, we've worked together and found a way to permanently fund a rescue tug for ships in the Strait of Juan de Fuca or on the open-ocean coast, giving us the ability to prevent a seaborne crisis from becoming a natural and economic disaster. Further, this law shifts the cost of prevention from Washington tax payers to the industry that poses the risk, saving tax payers millions. This is an important step in protecting the health and beauty of our coastal and marine systems, keeping them intact for future generations.

State Government Climate Leadership – Senate Bill 5560

The State of Washington must lead by example when it comes to Climate Change. That's why I introduced Senate Bill 5560 requiring state agencies to reduce their climate impact in accordance

with emission reductions standards. The law also requires the state motor pool have minimum mpg and emissions. The bill leads the state towards establishing a climate change response plan – another step forward in dealing with this global crisis. The bill increases accountability by establishing a single point of responsibility for all energy and climate change initiatives within state agencies. These are groundbreaking steps for the state that ensure our commitment to preventing climate disaster.



Lake Whatcom – Senate Bill 5944

We've learned more and more about the dangers of phosphorous in our waters, and how harmful it can be to fish and the ecosystem. Lake Whatcom represents not only a natural resource crisis, but a human health crisis, as the lake serves as the drinking water supply for 96,000 Whatcom County residents, including Bellingham. The legislation calls for the Puget Sound Partnership to work on a coordinated pilot project to help battle phosphorous and other pollution loading into Lake Whatcom. This legislation raises the issue of Lake Whatcom's health from a local priority to a state priority under the Puget Sound Partnership's Action

Agenda. This will be critical if we are to be successful in restoring the lake's water quality. This bill is a good example of what we can accomplish when the state, county, and city governments work together for a common goal.



Scenic Byway Ferry Route – Senate Bill 5289

The San Juan Island ferry route is one of the most scenic and picturesque routes anyone can travel in our state, and now that fact is cemented into state law. The ferry routes, as well as several roads on Orcas and San Juan Islands, are now the newest portion of state roads designated as part of the Scenic Byway roadways in Washington. This designation will help increase local revenues in Anacortes and the San Juan Islands through tourism while spotlighting not only the scenic beauty of the region, but also the incredible natural resources and wildlife.

Domestic Partnerships – Senate Bill 5688

Our state provides certain rights to married couples, such as the right to wages and benefits when a spouse is injured, or unpaid wages upon death of a spouse. The passage of this legislation allows Washington citizens registered as domestic partners to receive a broader suite of rights and responsibilities. In difficult economic times such as these, it is even more important that all Washington families have equal protection under the law.

EDUCATION

Students today are growing up in a world entirely different from the one we grew up in. Our children are surrounded by science and technology that was the stuff of science fiction only 20 or 30 years ago.

Our schools need to keep pace with our changing world so that our children are ready and able to compete in the global economy. As we navigate through tough economic times and a national recession, we can't allow this influence to impair the education of an entire generation of students.

In 2009, the Legislature continued work to rebuild our basic education system giving every child the opportunity to realize their potential. While education reform was a top priority for me this session, with the drastic budget shortfall we faced, even our top priorities were impacted. Each of the school districts in our communities is feeling the breadth of these impacts. House Bill 2261 redefines basic education and lays out a strategy for reform. The new definition will be fully implemented by

2018. This legislation includes programs for highly capable (gifted) students, increases instructional hours, and redefines basic education giving students



the ability to graduate with 24 credits from high school while also creating a new funding structure.

These kinds of major structural changes don't come easily – there are deeply held interests on all sides. I've diligently

worked with a number of other Senators and stakeholders – parents, teachers, and administrators – to come together and work on a solution that fit the needs of our students. I believe this bill is a good step in the right direction.

We continued work begun in the 2008 session to create a more student-focused educational system and provide targeted assistance to students who face unique barriers to educational success. Senate Bill 5973 continues the work of five task forces charged with researching and creating a comprehensive strategy for closing the achievement gap.

For years, school districts have noted that the current statutes impose a number of unfunded mandates on schools and have asked for flexibility to determine what best serves the learning needs of each unique community. We repealed numerous laws relating to information, notice and reporting requirements imposed on districts, as well as curriculum mandates.

TRANSPORTATION

The Legislature adopted a \$7.5 billion transportation budget for the 2009-11 biennium that includes \$4.7 billion in funding for more than 400 roads and ferry projects across the state. This transportation budget is the largest in state history, and translates to as many as 49,000 jobs.

Funded primarily with our state's gas taxes, these funds are constitutionally dedicated to building, maintaining and operating our state highway and marine highways systems. Our state received \$492 million in Federal Stimulus Highway Funds as part of the American Recovery & Investment Act – including \$341.4 million that will be allocated directly by the state to “shovel ready” projects.



An average of 10 jobs are created or retained for each \$1 million in highway spending – meaning that this stimulus will not only provide needed highway improvements, but will also put thousands of people to work within three months, and keep thousands more on the job for a year or longer.

As a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, I was fortunate to work closely with the committee chair and leadership to ensure key priorities for the 40th District were in the final budget.

I am proud of the significant accomplishments we made this session with regard to transportation projects in our communities. There are many projects throughout the district that will

improve transportation and also provide valuable jobs when our communities need them most.

Approximately \$93 million will be invested locally to improve transportation in Whatcom, Skagit and San Juan Counties. We will be making improvements to the I-5 ramp and stormwater drainage in Bellingham at 36th Street, widening and adding lanes on SR-20, creating a new Park & Ride at Chuckanut Drive, and rebuilding the interchange at Josh Wilson Road.

With help from the Transportation Committee chair, we were able to save the Anacortes-Sydney ferry, a critical economic driver for the San Juan Islands, Anacortes and the region. We maintained a modest ferry fare increase of only 2.5% and we have committed significant monies to the construction of new ferries and millions in preservation of existing ferries and terminals.

THE STATE OPERATING BUDGET



We all know the economic crisis has left its mark on businesses and families across the country. When I

arrived in Olympia for session, we were expecting a \$5 billion budget shortfall – that is, \$5 billion less than the state budgeted the previous biennium. By the time we got to March, the economy slipped even further and we were left with a \$9 billion shortfall, more than 25% of our state's \$37 billion budget.

To balance the budget, it was necessary to make severe and deliberate cuts to programs across state government – the kind of tough cuts I had hoped I would never have to make as your Senator.

Through a combination of federal resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and fund transfers, we were able to solve about \$5.9 billion of the budget puzzle, and the remaining \$3.2 billion through difficult cuts. Cuts occurred in basic health



care for the working poor, our local college enrollment, K-12 education and hundreds of other important programs. Know that I am committed to reinvesting in these areas as we move toward economic recovery. We will get back to having our higher education system with our universities, as well as community colleges, being among the best in the nation. We will invest again in expanding health care for children, and we will work towards ensuring our public schools have the resources needed to give our children a world-class education.

We're here to help

There's no way around it – these are difficult times. It is in times like these however; that I believe it is even more important for each of us to do what we can to support one another and our communities. Be it volunteering at a community event or helping a neighbor, a little effort can go a long way towards making someone's life a little easier. Know that my office is here to help you if you need assistance dealing with state government. Always feel free to contact my office at 360-786-7678 or email me at ranker.kevin@leg.wa.gov if there's something we can help you with.

INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Every year the state invests in long term construction and infrastructure projects with the Capital Budget.

Over \$3 billion in bonds are used to build schools, maintain community programs, and keep our state's economy moving. This year, we were successful in securing funds for a number of projects in our area:

- Miller Hall renovation at Western Washington University – \$55 million

- Skagit Valley College Academic and Student Services building – \$3.6 million
- \$1.5 million to preserve Blanchard Mountain wilderness
- Nearly \$1.5 million for Moran, Bay View, and Larrabee state parks
- \$420,000 to invest in DNR preserves in Anacortes and on San Juan Island

SPS#09-7375 EAR, 06-09

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