

# Kevin Ranker

## 2012 Legislative Session Wrap-up



### Majority Assistant Whip

#### Committees:

- Energy, Natural Resources & Marine Waters (Chair)
- Transportation

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### Dear neighbors,

As you've probably heard, the 60-day legislative session and subsequent 30-day special session came to a close last month after Democrats and Republicans reached an agreement and passed a budget ending a marathon 23-hour floor session.

After three years of cuts totaling nearly \$10 billion, we began session with another \$1.5 billion revenue shortfall. From the start, my budget priorities were clear: No more cuts to education - from kindergarten to graduate school. We must maintain our public safety net and family planning services. We must invest in programs that put Washingtonians back to work. And at the end of the day, our budget must be balanced.

While arriving at our agreement proved extremely difficult, ultimately, the Republicans agreed with most of the Democratic proposal introduced one month earlier and we came together for the good of all Washingtonians.

**The good:** The biggest personal accomplishment of 2012 was passing a historic marriage equality law. On the budget side, we recognized our schools and students cannot withstand any further cuts and completely protected all education funding in this session's budget. After years of cuts to services for working families, this year we were able to stop the bleeding for many critical public services. The final budget made no cuts to family planning, food assistance or the Disability Lifeline. We closed the tax loophole for Wall Street banks and passed a jobs package that will create 18,000 new jobs, 420 of which will be right here in the 40th District.

**The disappointing:** Just prior to the end of the regular special session, three Democratic senators joined Republicans to take over the Senate floor and pass a budget that had never been seen or received any public input. It made over \$100 million in cuts to education, family planning, food assistance and other crucial public services. These fundamental differences in values and priorities drove us into a special session. In our month in the minority, we saw what a true conservative budget looks like. The Republican budget devastated K-12 and higher education, significantly impacted programs for the poor and most vulnerable in our communities and targeted women's health care choices by eliminating family planning services.

After a loud public outcry, Republicans retreated from their position and joined us to support a budget without these cuts.

While the final budget was good, I remained extremely disappointed that the Republican majority blocked us from moving forward with critical legislation to ensure women receive insurance coverage for reproductive health care choices. The Reproductive Parity Act was quickly dropped from any discussion by the new majority Republicans as too divisive and threatening to the negotiation process.

Now that session is over, I will be back at work in our district offices in Bellingham and Anacortes. As always, never hesitate to share your thoughts or concerns about how we can work together to improve the quality of life in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "K-R", written over a light blue background.

Kevin Ranker

## Supplemental operating budget

The vast majority of our focus during session was on developing a supplemental operating budget that would support sustainable, long-term economic recovery while also trying to meet the ever-growing needs of our communities during the recession.

### Supplemental budget overview:

- It makes no reductions in funding of public schools, colleges or universities.
- It does not eliminate or reduce the Basic Health Plan.
- It does not cut family planning or public health funding.
- It funds homecare worker training.
- It does not eliminate the Disability Lifeline serving 26,000 adults who are unable to work.
- It includes new revenue, including \$14.5 million from closing a tax exemption for Wall St. banks and \$12 million from cigarette manufacturing.

Budgets are about more than just numbers on a page. A commitment to people, as opposed to an abstract financial concept, is my guiding principle when it comes to the budget. When we weigh our decisions, it is essential to ask ourselves, "How will this affect my neighbor who can't find a job? How will this affect their family?" The budget we passed honors this commitment to people.

We also passed a capital budget that will help put people back to work. It will improve storm water infrastructure, provide funds for Skagit Valley College and Western Washington University, and Skagit Public Utilities District. The capital budget brings \$42 million to the 40th district and creates approximately 420 jobs in San Juan, Skagit and Whatcom Counties. A detailed list of projects is available on my website and on the back of this newsletter.

Finally, the operating budget is sustainable - it balances our books and leaves us with a healthy reserve of \$320 million in emergency funds should our steady recovery falter down the road.

## Breakthrough on teacher evaluations

This year we passed Senate Bill 5895, which further develops a teacher evaluation system by 2015-16. This compromise represents a step in the right direction for our public education system.

This legislation is the continuation of a process begun in 2010 to reform our educator evaluation system from the ground-up based on educator feedback on what works in the classroom. We worked closely with the school districts piloting the new system, including the Anacortes School District, to refine the new evaluation system in a way that both moves the current system forward towards statewide implementation and protects the due process rights of our teachers. While the bill creates consequences for educators who continue to receive the lowest evaluation rating for multiple years, it also includes new professional development opportunities and training requirements meant to ensure fair and consistent implementation of the new system statewide.

An evaluation system that not only provides instructional feedback, but also helps teachers and principals develop their own professional growth program will lead to a better learning environment for all students.



## Discover Pass reform

Each year, state recreation lands see over 40 million visitors. Not only do these lands help protect natural resources and create vibrant communities, they are also critical economic drivers. Many communities across the state could not bear the economic impact associated with the closure of state parks and recreational lands.

In an effort to make state lands self-sustaining, I introduced and passed legislation last year to create the Discover Pass, a universal parking permit for state parks and recreational lands.

After its first summer of implementation, it became clear that some common sense changes needed to happen. This year, in response to what we heard from citizens statewide, we made the pass transferable between two vehicles and allowed persons holding a group event, such as a wedding, to buy a group pass instead of every member of their wedding needing their own pass.

Revenue derived from violations was also redirected from counties back to the parks operating the Discover Pass program.

Together, these reforms strengthen our ability to keep our parks and recreational lands open – allowing us to protect both our recreational resources and the jobs that depend upon them.



## Marriage equality for all Washingtonians

In a year of budget turmoil we were able to do something truly wonderful for thousands of Washington families. This year, Washington joined six other states across the nation by passing marriage equality. For each of us, this legislation touches upon what we hold most dear – our sense of family and love.

Growing up, I was taught that a family was not determined by the genders of the persons involved but by the love and commitment that they shared. I was taught that every person is to be treated with respect and dignity. By continuing to differentiate between types of loving relationships, we separate and isolate those within our communities.

For many, including myself, this bill recognizes the conclusion of a decades-long journey. It represents a historic step toward extending fundamental human rights and freedoms that we embrace in America to all of our citizens.

This legislation will provide thousands of families with the respect and dignity they deserve. I was deeply honored this year to have had the opportunity to stand up and be on the right side of history by strongly supporting marriage equality.



## Marine management

This session, I continued my efforts to put Washington in the forefront of the nation with regard to marine management by sponsoring, and ultimately passing, Senate Bill 6263.

We face an ever-increasing demand for limited space and resources in our Sound and ocean.

My legislation will allow us to plan for this increasing demand in a manner that both protects existing marine uses, such as recreation, fishing and commerce and encourages new uses such as off-shore renewable energy development - while preserving a healthy marine ecosystem for our children and the economy.

## Ferries: Preserving service and expanding the fleet

With over 22 million riders, our ferries transport more people than SeaTac Airport annually. Ferries are also one of the state's single largest tourist attractions, bringing in over \$15 billion in tourism dollars in 2010.

This year we funded construction of a second 144-car ferry. This combined with the new 144-car ferry we funded last year make it possible that the San Juan Island route will see a new ferry.

As a resident of one of the most ferry-dependent areas of the state, I know well the effect ferry service cuts, rate-increases and inadequate capacity can have on communities. I'm extremely pleased that in this year's budget we were able to avoid both service cuts and rate increases.

## Building a green-energy economy

The 2012 legislative session marked my first year handling energy issues in my capacity as Chair of the Senate Energy, Natural Resources and Marine Waters Committee. I chose to focus my initial efforts on incentivizing new green energy production and creating and maintaining jobs through green energy innovation.

One of my energy related bills passed this session, Senate Bill 6414, will provide a significant incentive for utilities and power project developers to make new investments in our state's renewable energy profile. This bill cuts through the red tape and gives them valuable insight when it comes to laying ground on potential projects.

Senate Bill 5575 adds new sources to the list of eligible biomass products and organic matter used to generate

electricity. This carefully crafted legislation maintains our state's commitment to renewable energy, as well as our commitment to vibrant local economies.

I also sponsored proposals to modernize our state's Energy Independence Act in order to better reflect Washington's economy and unique energy mix. Important steps were made in updating this important act while protecting its goal of decreasing our dependence on non-renewable energy sources. I intend to continue this conversation over the interim and into next session.

On the whole, we made great gains in promoting energy investments in our state and reforming our green energy economy, while also preserving deeply needed jobs.

Now is not the time to stand idle when it comes to job creation. Now is the time to create desperately needed jobs by maintaining critical infrastructure and investing in our communities. Below is a list of capital projects that I worked hard to secure for the 40th District. **These projects will create approximately 420 jobs in the 40th District this year.** You may find more details regarding these important projects on my website at: [www.sdc.wa.gov/senators/ranker](http://www.sdc.wa.gov/senators/ranker)

**Orcas Island Schools - \$1,000,000**

After working with Orcas Island School District Administration and the Orcas Island School Board, I am pleased to announce our success in securing funding for critical repairs and upgrades for Orcas Island Schools. These upgrades will increase the longevity of our school buildings while making them more energy efficient and safer for our kids.

**Redevelopment of Bellingham waterfront - \$1,500,000**

Redevelopment of Bellingham’s waterfront and downtown core is an incredibly promising opportunity. Cleanup of this brownfield site is the first step toward meaningful development and progress.

**Puget Sound Corps - \$13,000,000**

Last year, I sponsored legislation to create the Puget Sound Corps to create jobs for youth and veterans while improving the health of Puget Sound. While the employment rate has made recent gains, it has remained particularly low among both these groups. This capital appropriation will create approximately 260 jobs for youth and veterans this year.

**Mt. Vernon flood levee improvements - \$1,500,000**

Residents of Skagit and Whatcom Counties know too well the danger the floods pose for our families, communities

and our livelihood. This appropriation is necessary to safeguard our communities and prevent future floods.

**Hatchery improvements - \$34,775,000**

Recreational and commercial fishing combined account for over 16,000 jobs in Washington. When accounting for tribal fishing activities, the number grows even higher. Proper upkeep of our hatcheries is a top priority.

**Western Washington University and Skagit Valley College - \$32,104,000 (combined)**

It’s no secret that our state’s higher education institutions are the gateway to our future economic success. These renovations and enhancements will create hundreds of jobs and provide safe, energy efficient 21st century learning environment for our aspiring students.

**Secret Harbor estuary restoration – Cypress Island – \$535,000**

We in the 40th District have a great treasure in Cypress Island. Funds appropriate this session will enable the Department of Natural Resources to increase the number of campsites and renovate the Island’s loop trail to improve public safety so visitors and northwest natives alike can enjoy the serenity it has to offer for years to come.

**Stay in touch!** As always, never hesitate to contact me with your thoughts and questions about state government. Please feel free to contact me at either of my district offices. I am happy to discuss any issues or ideas you have. I look forward to seeing you around the great 40th District.

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