



Washington State Senator • 44th Legislative District

Sen. Steve Hobbs

2012 Legislative Report

Senator Steve Hobbs

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Committee assignments:

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Insurance (Chair)
- Transportation
- Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development
- Early Learning & K-12 Education

After all the back and forth, all the political posturing and gamesmanship, and despite what seemed like an ideological chasm between the two parties, I was happy to see both parties put their differences aside for the sake of all Washingtonians.

It took literally all day, and a good chunk of the following morning, but when the dust settled we had come together as a group to balance our budget and pass some truly meaningful reforms for the betterment of the state.

This was not an easy session. There were many tense moments and tough votes, but in the end we worked accross the aisle and accomplished some great things as a group for our state as a whole.

I was proud to vote “yes” for a bipartisan budget that supports education and spares the least vulnerable among us from the deep cuts that have threatened safety net programs in past budgets.

I was especially proud to vote “yes” on some absolutely critical pieces of reform legislation that will put our state on a sustainable path.

Taking on things like pension reform, long-term balanced budget writing and K-12 employee insurance reform will help us avoid future budget deficits.

Back in December, Senate Democrats proposed a list of 34 reforms that we felt would help our state conduct business in a more cost-efficient manner. I’m happy to report that 21 of those measures passed and, as a group, are estimated to save the state nearly \$70 million in the current biennium and more than \$350 million over the next five years.

This is the way business should be done in Olympia; identifying a problem and working together to craft a solution.

I was also proud to take “yes” votes this session on bills to help military families, crack down on human trafficking and protect our friends and neighbors from foreclosure.

Both parties in the House and Senate as well as the governor put our differences aside and coalesced behind an idea we all care about most – doing what’s best for Washington.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Hobbs".

Steve

Creating equity in an unfair system

Chances are if you know about my bill to consolidate the K-12 school employee health care system, you have an opinion on it.

While it's true that had the original version of this bill passed, it would have meant a big change for the K-12 health insurance system, it is also true that it was a system in dire need of a change.

From the beginning, this bill was about fairness. There were many K-12 employees that simply could not pay for and were not offered the same affordable rates others in their profession received. How is it fair for a



classroom assistant in Yelm to make \$900 per month while paying \$750 a month for insurance? How is it fair for a school bus driver in Camas to work 20 hours a week and pay \$730 per month for health care coverage?

The new version of this bill, SB 5940, also goes after this problem, but it also allows school districts some time to put their own houses in order and create a system that doesn't punish employees for wanting to cover a spouse or child on their health plan.

The new bill provides an incentive of \$5 million to the state's school districts to meet the following requirements in how they administer health benefits:

- Offer employees the option to enroll in a Health Savings Account/High Deductible plan with a health savings account;
- Move toward employee premiums so family coverage costs no more than three times the premiums charged for employee-only coverage;
- Offer at least one comprehensive plan in which a full-time employee's share of premium costs does not exceed the share of premium costs paid by state employees in the PEBB plan;
- Employ responsible procurement standards for all contracts.

This bill has absolutely no impact on anyone's ability to collectively bargain.

If the Office of the Insurance Commissioner determines that a school district does not report the necessary data for two reporting periods, that district will be required to obtain benefits through the Public Employee Benefit Board.

Let me be clear, this bill is a work in progress. I look forward to working with the school districts, teachers, insurance providers and anyone else with a stake in this process – that's the only way we're going to get this right.

Winning the battle against foreclosures

While this isn't the problem it was a year or two ago, many of our friends and neighbors continue the battle to stay in their homes.

With that in mind, I added amendments to House Bill 2614 to continue the work of the Foreclosure Fairness Act (FFA) as well as add additional remedies and protections for other parts of the foreclosure process.

One amendment strengthened the FFA, which has proved a valuable weapon afforded to families trying

to stay in their homes. Another amendment provided a course of action for homeowners who have lost their home due to mistakes in the foreclosure process. Without this change, people who lost their homes due to error had no way to get back in their houses.

Foreclosures are an ongoing issue across our country and throughout our state. We must give families every opportunity to remain in their homes and level the playing field between homeowners, banks and other lenders.

Construction and transportation projects coming to the 44th

One of our most effective weapons against unemployment is the construction industry.



The passage of the transportation and capital budgets included many projects and improvements which I fought to deliver to the 44th.

The capital budget will improve our infrastructure and bring many family wage jobs to our

district. Among the projects in the capital budget I'm most proud of are the improvements and expansion to the Washington Aerospace Training & Research Center (WATRC), which has distinguished itself as the most successful aerospace training program in the state.

Unfortunately, the demand for trained aerospace workers has surpassed the number of students who leave the center ready to fill these positions. These funds will alleviate this problem.

The WATRC is an outstanding example of how we can train Washington citizens to fill Washington jobs.

The center was developed and accredited by the legislature in 2008. Currently, nine of 10 graduates are placed in local, family-wage aerospace jobs. In Snohomish County alone, more than 6,500 aerospace jobs have been added over the past year. This number is expected to only increase as Boeing continues to ramp up production.

There were equally as many victories for our district in the transportation budget. Headlining the package is the

allocation of \$650,000 for advance preliminary and geotechnical engineering on the Snohomish River Bridge on State Route 9. The preliminary work will put in place a plan to widen the bridge. We are also anticipating improvements at the Getchell Road intersection at SR 9 and 84th Street NE.



Your Facebook page is your business



Recently I proposed a bill which would make it illegal for any employer or potential employer in the state to request your password and gain access to any social media site to which you belong, such as Facebook.

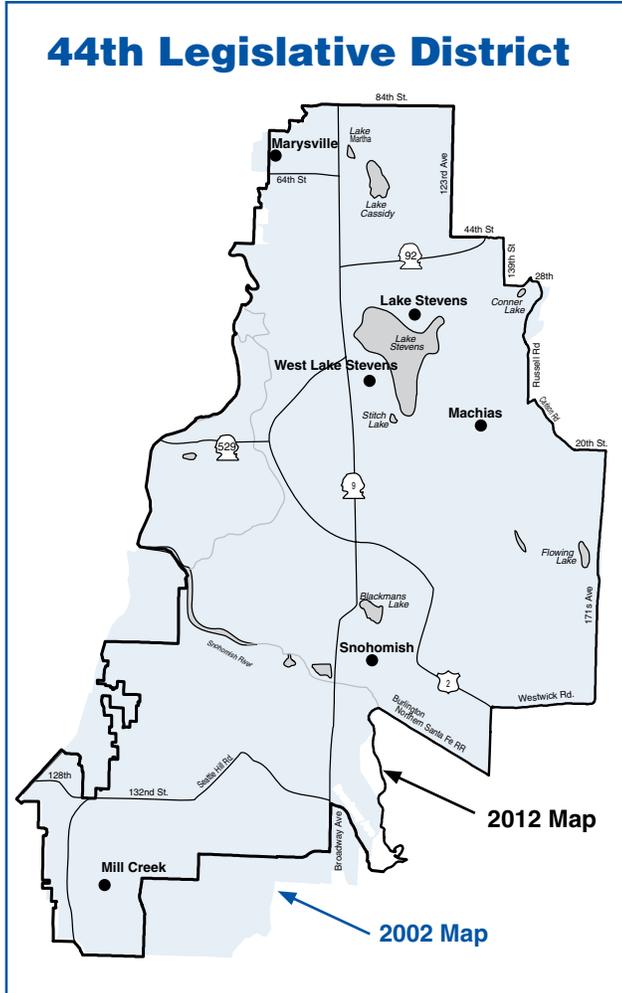
While there isn't an epidemic of employers practicing this sort of invasion of privacy, there have been recent reports of this happening. I felt it would be a good idea to stop this practice now, rather than wait until it does become a problem.

As a society, we are more connected than ever, but that doesn't mean that employers have a right to read your email or drop by to take a look around your house. Personally I feel like this bill will protect employers as well. If an employer were to gain access to applicants' pages and decide not to hire them, was that decision made because of their age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation? That has lawsuit written all over it.

This bill didn't move during special session, but I plan to continue forward with it in the future.

Are you still in the 44th?

This map shows both the old and new lines of the 44th Legislative District. If you will no longer be in the 44th, it was a pleasure and honor to serve as your senator. If you're uncertain to what district you belong, you can go to my Web site, type in your address and know for sure.



Senator Steve Hobbs talks with First Sergeant Brandon Reik in January following Sgt. Reik's re-enlistment ceremony in Olympia. Sen. Hobbs, a veteran of conflicts in Iraq and Kosovo, presided over the ceremony.

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2012 End-of-Session Newsletter

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