

Senator Bob

MORTON

7th Legislative District Session Update



How to contact me:

115 Irving R. Newhouse Bldg.
PO Box 40407
Olympia, WA 98504-0407

Telephone: (360) 786-7612

Fax: (360) 786-1999

Toll-Free Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

E-mail: morton.bob@leg.wa.gov
(Please include your name and mailing address in the text of your e-mail.)

Web site:

www.senatorepublicans.wa.gov/morton

Standing Committees

- Ranking Republican Member, Senate Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation;
- Senate Environment, Water & Energy;
- Senate Agriculture & Rural Economic Development

Spring 2010

Dear Neighbors,

As you may know, the clash between Democrat majority leaders in the House and Senate over which taxes to increase pushed the Legislature into a special session on March 15. The impasse was not resolved until day 29 of the special session.

Legislative leaders had a choice: Reform and reduce the size of government or raise taxes. In the last five years, my colleagues and I have offered 55 ideas to reform state government and bring spending in line with revenue. Please visit our website for more information.

<http://senatorepublicans.wa.gov/03011055solutions/55Solutions.pdf>

The state's revenue problem will not go away without fundamental reform. Government cannot be all things to all people.

In the end, a \$2.5 billion three-year tax package was enacted.

While I am greatly disappointed that the majority party turned aside reforms in favor of more taxes, I do have some good news to share with you in this report. If you have any questions or need more information, please let me know.

Cordially yours,



Boundary Dam compromise bill signed into law

Boundary Dam, owned by Seattle City Light, keeps 800 acres of land off Pend Oreille County's tax rolls. Because of this, the utility is required to pay impact fees to help support the county's basic services. Because of stalled negotiations, Seattle City Light did not pay 2009 impact fees to Pend Oreille County until Feb. 16, 2010.



Boundary Dam

On March 24, House Bill 2925 was signed into law. This measure was the companion to Senate Bill 6480, which I sponsored. When this bill got to the Senate, it still had sticking points because of Seattle's sizeable delegation in the Legislature. One of the Seattle legislators, Sen. Joe McDermott, agreed to sit down with me and find a way to get this measure to the governor's desk.

As enacted, the new law:

- Clarifies that either the county or the utility may initiate arbitration by serving written notice of the intent to arbitrate.
- Clarifies that arbitration must commence within 60 days of service of the notice.
- Clarifies that the utility will cover the cost of arbitration, except that the city and the utility are responsible for their own attorneys' fees and their own costs of litigation.

Burden on Stevens, Ferry and Pend Oreille counties lifted by passage of Senate Bill 6481

Small counties lack the staffing and expertise to adopt forest practices approval ordinances when a forest landowner in these counties applies to the Department of Natural Resources to harvest or thin a stand of trees. The Growth Management Act put the adoption of these ordinances into state law and created a burden on Stevens, Ferry, Pend Oreille and other counties.

My measure, SB 6481, which was signed into law on March 25, allows counties with a population of less than 100,000 to opt out of adopting forest practices approval ordinances. By making this change in law, small counties will have time to follow a systematic process as its population moves toward the threshold.

New law will help preserve public and private forestland

The House version of Senate Bill 6256, which I co-sponsored in the Senate, was signed into law on March 24. House Bill 2541 promotes the development of conservation incentive proposals that support forest landowners in maintaining their land in forestry. The Department of Natural Resources is the lead agency in crafting these proposals. The work will be done in consultation with the Forest Practices Board, Indian Tribes, small forest landowners, conservation groups, industrial foresters and federal and local governments. A report is due to the Legislature by Dec. 31, 2011.

The forest products industry is Washington's second largest manufacturing industry and alone provides nearly 45,000 direct jobs and nearly 100,000 indirect jobs, many located in rural areas.

Farm-backed bills become law

- Senate Bill 6229 extends the expiration date of the dairy inspection assessment from June 30, 2010, to June 30, 2015. The dairy inspection program is important to allow milk to be exported out of state.
- Senate Bill 6299 authorizes the Washington State Department of Agriculture to inspect cattle imported into the state to ensure they do not co-mingle with resident stock. Regulation of imported cattle by the United States Department of Agriculture officials is inadequate.

Forest biomass industry gets boost

A new law authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to maintain a list of all potential sources of forest biomass on state lands for the purpose of making biomass available for sale and conversion into energy and biofuel. DNR may enter into contracts for the removal of forest biomass from state lands and may lease state lands for the sale and conversion of biomass into energy and biofuel. A key provision of the bill for our region is the requirement that DNR evaluate how the forest biomass supply agreements can be used to sustain or create rural jobs and timber manufacturing. The bill was introduced in both the House and Senate. I co-sponsored the Senate version, Senate Bill 6236.

Removing dead and dying trees from forestlands is a key part of improving forest health by reducing the spread of insect infestations, disease and the risk of wild fires.

This session we also approved a measure that provides for the development of a dedicated radio frequency for fire fighter mobilization when a wild fire crosses jurisdictional boundaries. Statewide fire mobilization is organized by the Washington State Patrol. Currently, different agencies operate on different frequencies.

Snowpack “pretty darn low”

I am a member of the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought. We met mid-March for an update on how the El Niño climate pattern is affecting precipitation and temperatures and creating conditions for drought this summer.

According to the state’s snowpack expert, the snowpack is “pretty darn low” because of our warm and relatively dry winter. He said snow below 4,000 feet in the Cascades is almost nonexistent.

We need a good snowpack for a good spring buildup. A poor spring runoff means a water shortage that will significantly impact how much water Eastern Washington farmers will have to irrigate their crops. Water-starved crops do not end up in markets. It will be another blow to our economic recovery.

The state Department of Ecology is predicting fish passage, flow and habitat problems in many streams this summer and fall. Projected average stream flows in the upper Columbia basin are expected to be between 64 and 83 percent of normal.

What the drought committee is focusing on is a process to close the gap between a ‘heads up’ and a full alert. It is essential to plan well ahead of a drought.

The 2010 supplemental capital budget provides \$4 million in funding for drought preparedness.



Josh Anderson and Senator Morton in the Senate Chamber. Josh Anderson of Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company in Colville traveled to Olympia with a message of urgency for enhanced forest thinning to save timber stands from wild fires, disease and insect infestations. He testified at the joint meeting of the House and Senate natural resources committees on March 4.

2010 Supplemental Transportation Budget

I am pleased to report that funding is included in the supplemental transportation budget for paving S.R. 21, Malo to Kettle River, and for the chip seal project on U.S. 97, Okanogan to Riverside.

However, no money was provided for the Keller ferry that was taken out of service last October because of a leak. The Keller ferry, called “Martha S,” takes vehicles across the Columbia River just north of Wilbur toward Keller, Republic and Ferry County. The loss of the ferry means 50 miles of extra driving through Grand Coulee.

The Keller ferry, in service since 1949, is the only inland ferry operated by the Washington State Department of Transportation. For the last four years, I have urged the department to ask for funding to replace the old and potentially dangerous vessel. The funding was requested this year, but was not included in the final budget.

Osoyoos Park

On March 11, the Washington State Parks Commission approved the transfer of operations of Osoyoos Lake State Veterans Memorial Park to the City of Oroville.

Last fall, Oroville Mayor C.F. “Chuck” Spieth and Raleigh Chinn, President of the Okanogan County Tourism Council contacted me for support here in Olympia with the Washington State Parks Commission. We worked with others as well, and brought this effort to a successful conclusion.

This is a win-win situation for Oroville, park users and the state. Given the state’s revenue problems, we can avoid park closures by transferring park property where there is an interest and a commitment.

Race to The Top

Federal “Race to the Top” dollars are available to states with strong laws that hold schools accountable for student performance. Washington missed out on the first round of funding because we did not meet the federal standards. This year, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 6696 hoping to make the state eligible for the next round of funding.

Senate Bill 6696 provides a new authority and process for the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education to enact an accountability system that recognizes successful schools; and requires certain actions by school districts in which at least one school falls among the lowest 5 percent of persistently low-achieving schools according to federal definitions.

Good “jobs” bills approved

- Senate Bill 6789 will provide tax incentives to attract data services businesses to rural counties in Washington. Since the economic downturn, Washington has lost out on hosting data centers for Yahoo, Facebook, Google, and Amazon, among others. Microsoft cut back on its plans for expansion in Washington and moved its servers to Texas, citing Washington’s tax burden as the main reason for the move.
- Senate Bill 6712 would extend expiring tax incentives for certain clean alternative fuel vehicles, producers of certain biofuels, and Federal Aviation Administration certified repair stations.

Budget proviso spends \$250,000 on plan to consolidate small school districts

The final 2010 supplemental budget includes \$250,000 for a statewide school district reorganization commission. This proviso was not part of the Legislature’s budget until the last minute. The language was added by the House of Representatives on April 12 as a result of closed-door budget negotiations. No public hearing was ever held on this proviso. Washington citizens were left with no voice in the matter. In small rural communities like ours, schools are more than classrooms to educate our children. They are gathering places and a source of community pride. They have special meaning to people and hold a special place in their lives. I joined many voices from our district and other communities across the state in asking the governor to veto this proviso.

(Senate Bill 6444, Part V-Education Sec. 501 (1) (b))

Plan dies to eliminate the Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Parks Commission

Senate Bill 6813, which would have merged the Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Parks into the Department of Natural Resources, received a public hearing on Feb. 17 in the Senate Natural Resources, Ocean and Recreation Committee, on which I serve. The bill did not get out of committee.

The discussion we had in committee did have some value, but this proposed merger needs a lot more public input and discussion. I support efficiencies, but I also want

to make sure ideas actually make government more efficient and provide better service to the public. I have stated I am a firm “no” on this proposal.

Mega agencies are rarely successful. They usually become a bureaucratic nightmare for citizens – anyone who has had to deal with the Department of Social and Health Services knows this first-hand. Year after year, bills to break up DSHS have been introduced in the Legislature.