



Session update from Olympia

December 16, 2011

## Special session adjourns, tackles piece of budget shortfall



*Click the picture above to listen to a video report regarding the special session from Senator Brown*

Our work in Olympia was about listening to the concerns of people across Washington, and making the best choices to balance our budget.

We are well ahead of where we'd otherwise be if the Legislature had simply convened in January. The decisions we make in the weeks ahead will determine the availability of health care services to seniors, the college opportunities open to our students, and the quality of our kids' educational experience. Those decisions deserve time and consideration, and we will give them that.

Our responsibility as elected officials is to put our constituents first and foremost. That means following the democratic process of

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hearing from the many people whose lives might be changed by the cuts; looking beyond the governor's proposal for missed alternatives; and collaborating with our House and Republican colleagues to build the consensus necessary to pass the budget.

We have made a substantial down payment of \$497.7 million against the overall \$2 billion budget problem through a combination of cuts, transfers and delayed payments. This is an important step in writing a budget, and it was taken in a bipartisan fashion with overwhelming support. [To read my full blog post on this topic click here.](#)

## Securing funding for aerospace training in Spokane

Some of the good news that came out of special session was the securing of \$1 million in new student loan funding for aerospace training. The Spokane Aerospace Technology Center, which will open in 2012, is one of three centers where the loan will fund students, and help them access short term customizable training programs. This money is in addition to the \$500 thousand used to start this program earlier this year.

Some people are surprised to learn that there are over 80 Aerospace firms in our area. Customized aerospace training programs support our growing aerospace industry cluster. This funding will help ensure an available and trained workforce which is integral to a vibrant and competitive aerospace industry in our region.

## State Legislature to Congress: Pass the Main Street Fairness Act

We made the effort this special session to pass a joint memorial [SJM 8009](#) sponsored by [Sen. Debbie Regala](#) asking Congress to move on the Main Street Fairness Act. This federal legislation would require out-of-state companies that exceed \$500,000 in annual sales to collect and remit sales tax on products sold to customers in Washington. It is projected to generate \$483 million in lost sales tax revenues for our state during the 2013-2015 biennium, including \$306.5 million for the general state operating budget and \$176.5 million for local governments.

We heard testimony in the Senate Ways & Means Committee from large retailers such as R.E.I. and Walmart supporting the bill, and it is

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## State jobs gains soar in November

Washington added an estimated 12,100 jobs in November, our state's largest one-month gain in four years, according to the Employment Security Department. The department adjusts its projections to account for seasonal hiring trends, meaning the new jobs projected don't include temporary hiring such as for additional sales help during the holidays.

Jobs grew in nearly every industry sector, showing surprising strength as the state heads into winter.

Also last month, the department says the state's unemployment rate fell from 9.1 percent in October to 8.7 percent in November. You can [read the full report here.](#)

also worth noting that Washington based online retailer Amazon also now is supportive. Simply, this is a matter of tax fairness. Without action by Congress, in state businesses are losing sales to online purchases through out-of-state merchants who do not collect state sales taxes. We wanted to send a message to Congress, and especially our Washington state federal delegation, that the passage of this legislation could change lives in Washington now as we work to solve our current budget crisis.

## Fix to Foreclosure Fairness Act helps struggling homeowners in Washington

[Senate Bill 5988](#), sponsored by my colleague [Sen. Steve Hobbs](#), garnered unanimous support Wednesday in the House and Senate. The bill was a fix to the Foreclosure Fairness Act ([HB 1362](#)), passed during the regular session, and contained an emergency clause to immediately to help struggling homeowners.

The original bill provided homeowners who qualify the opportunity for mediation with their lender before a foreclosure can move forward. One part of the bill required that parties sign a waiver stating that neither party can call the mediator as a witness in any lawsuit related to the foreclosure process. This bill removed the requirement that parties must sign the waiver, after hearing concerns that the waiver requirement was severely slowing down the mediation process. Now homeowners who are referred to mediation will obtain the services they need quicker so many more people can stay in their homes.



Senator Brown answering the questions of a Brownie troop in her office. Photo courtesy of the Washington State Senate.

## Senate Page Program

Applications to the Senate Page Program can now be submitted. If you or somebody you know is age 14-16, and interested in being a page, please click [here](#) for more information or click [here](#) to download an application. The completed application can be mailed to: Senator Lisa Brown, PO Box 40403, Olympia, WA 98504.

# Season's Greetings

I want to wish you and your loved ones the very best this holiday season. As always, if you have questions or concerns, you can contact me via email or through my office. It is a privilege and an honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Click [here](#) for contact information for my Olympia or Spokane office.

