



Senator Margarita Prentice

11th Legislative District

April 17, 2009

Dear Friends,

The following newsletter update includes information on what bills the Legislature passed this week as well as some helpful community updates affecting our district.

I appreciate the record number of emails, phone calls and letters. Your comments and concerns are important to me and essential to my representing our district. You are always welcome to contact me on these and any other issues of interest.

Sincerely,

In this Issue:

- Bills passed this week
- New bills introduced
- Community news

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BILLS PASSED THIS WEEK

Payday lending

The average payday loan is used to pay everyday expenses, not long-term emergency needs. To help protect consumers who use payday loans, [House Bill 1709](#) limits borrowing to \$700 at one time. It also creates a database to track how many loans a customer has.

Domestic partnerships

[Senate Bill 5688](#), expanding domestic partnerships, has passed both the House and Senate and is now headed to the Governor's desk for a signature. These expanded rights and responsibilities include: using sick leave to care for a partner; pension benefits; workers' compensation coverage; and, the right to unemployment and disability benefits.

In 2007, the domestic partner registry was created. Since then, nearly 5,000 couples have registered to become domestic partners.

Childcare collective bargaining

The Senate passed [House Bill 1329](#) to improve child care quality and to strengthen early learning by providing young children a quality education from the start. Child care directors and workers are able to collectively bargain with the state over subsidy rates for children who have portions of their child care paid for by the state. This bill allows centers to opt-in to begin the unionization process and to lobby for fairer compensation.

Opportunity Internship Program

[House Bill 1355](#) (and companion [Senate Bill 5773](#)) passed to create the Opportunity Internship Program, which builds upon existing resources to develop educational and employment pipelines for low-income high school students in high-demand occupations.

The Opportunity Internship Program is modeled after the [In-Demand Scholars Program](#) that has already successfully placed 143 students in paid internships. Students chosen for the program will receive internships, apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships, counseling and up to one year of college financial aid, along with the promise of a job interview if they complete a post-secondary program of study. Local groups that help place students into jobs paying at least \$30,000 per year, will be eligible for incentive payments.

Apple Health for Kids

In 2007, the Legislature committed to providing all children in the state with comprehensive health care coverage by 2010. As a result, the number of uninsured children has dropped. [House Bill 2128](#), or the Apple Health for Kids Program, directs the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to increase outreach, enrollment and renewal efforts to improve the lives of children and help the state qualify for additional federal funding. This bill also delays the availability of children's health insurance for children in families with household income over 300 percent of the federal poverty level until January 1, 2010.

NEW BILLS INTRODUCED

Backfilling health care cuts

A bill has been introduced in the House, [House Bill 2377](#), to temporarily raise the state sales tax by three-tenths of 1 percent to help restore steep health care cuts. This bill must first pass both chambers of the legislature before being sent to voters in the general election. If passed, HB 2377 would generate more than \$500 million over the next two years, maintain enrollment in the state's program to provide subsidized health insurance for the working poor, and would help spare nursing homes, hospitals, local health districts and other health facilities from the kind of dramatic cuts that have been proposed.

The sales tax increase would expire at the end of 2012.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Online town hall

The Senate has launched an online town hall (<http://senatedemocrats.wa.gov/questions>) for constituents to have their voices heard in Olympia. People from all across the state are submitting questions on the budget, proposed funding cuts, and the possibility of revenue proposals heading for approval in November.

CTED releases online guide for small businesses in Washington state

The state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) released the *2009 Guide for Small Business in Washington State*. This guide provides entrepreneurs and small business owners access to a variety of resources needed to start and successfully manage a business. In addition, it provides tools and resources for developing a business plan and choosing the right business structure.

The free guide is available online at www.choosewashington.com/pdf/2009guideforsmallbusiness.pdf.

For more information regarding CTED, visit: www.cted.wa.gov.

Food benefits to increase for many Washington residents

Beginning April 1st, many people currently receiving food assistance through the state's food stamp program, Basic Food, will receive an increase in their monthly food benefits. The recently enacted federal stimulus legislation provides additional aid to people receiving food benefits. Changes in Basic Food provided by the federal stimulus package include:

- A 13.6 percent increase in maximum monthly benefit amounts for most households – meaning a four-person household could receive up to \$668 instead of \$588.
- Suspending the three-month time limit on food assistance for childless, unemployed adults through September 2010.

Households currently receiving Basic Food will automatically receive the higher benefits. The state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) sent letters to all affected households informing them of the upcoming increase to their monthly benefits.

For additional information regarding Basic Food, visit: www.foodhelp.wa.gov or call 1-877-514-FOOD (3663).

To contact me toll-free, call the Legislative Hotline at [1-800-562-6000](tel:1-800-562-6000).

To send any comments or to unsubscribe from this newsletter, visit: <http://www.sdc.wa.gov/senators/prentice/>.