



*Session update from Olympia*

*February 23, 2011*

**Dear Neighbor,**

We're already a third of the way through the 2011 legislative session and I am pleased to report significant progress on many key pieces of legislation.

**Early action taken to close budget shortfall**

It's no secret that the Legislature faces increasingly difficult choices when it comes to balancing the budget. Already we're working diligently on a series of careful, measured steps forged by Democrats and Republicans in unison in both the Senate and the House.

Agreement on one of the first of these steps came Tuesday in the form of early action legislation to shrink the \$550 million shortfall in the 2011 budget that runs through June 30 by \$367 million.

**House Bill 1086** accomplishes this by reducing public service expenditures by \$242 million and transferring \$125 million from other accounts. In this budget we managed to protect several critical public services, including the Basic Health Plan.

The remainder of the shortfall will be addressed between now and the end of the legislative session as lawmakers take up the even larger challenge of closing the nearly \$5 billion shortfall in the 2011-13

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budget.

You can [read more about the legislation here](#).

While this may seem daunting, there have been and will continue to be many bright spots this legislative session. Our prime focus must remain with the budget, but much progress has also been made in moving ideas forward protecting our quality of life and reforming government. Many of these government reforms will work to lessen the impacts of reductions that otherwise would have been much more severe.

By continuing down this path, it is my hope that we can reconcile what we demand in terms of quality of life and what we can afford.

### **Senate Policy Cut-Off**

The closing of the first phase of this year's legislative session is already upon us and I am pleased to report that many of my legislative proposals have now passed out of committee and continue to move forward in the legislative process.

Key among those advancing are:

[Senate Bill 5230](#), establishing the Puget Sound corps. This proposal stands to consolidate and enhance the current Washington Conservation Corps Program (WCC), creating approximately 150 green collar jobs for young adults and veterans.

Cutting across silos between agencies, the legislation consolidates four duplicative programs into one without fiscal impact. Not only does it create green collar jobs for veterans and young people, it also provides them training so they can keep working long after the program expires.

[Senate Bill 5451](#), legislation to aid homeowners

along shorelines. Households along shorelines are more often finding themselves subject to policy hindering their ability to acquire insurance and sometimes mortgages for their homes. Under local shoreline master programs along Washington's coastline, if a shoreline buffer changes over time, residential structures already in existence could be considered within nonconforming use for insurance purposes if expanded.

For residents, this can spell a high increase in premiums and can even affect the marketability of a home for sale on the market. My bill streamlines this policy and does so without consequence to shoreline master programs up and down Washington's coast.

[Senate Bill 5436](#), a proposal to make Washington State the first in the country to ban copper paint on boat bottoms. Copper paint has been used to protect boat bottoms for decades, but recent studies have shown that the consequences of this practice handily outweigh its benefits. The copper leached into Puget Sound can affect salmon, shellfish and the overall health of our aquatic ecosystem. With many price equivalent options on the market that do not utilize copper, the time has come to make the change that our Sound demands.

[Senate Bill 5439](#), legislation to strengthen liability when it comes to oil spills in Washington State. In Washington, vessels travel close to our shorelines and in confined waterways, including the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound and the Columbia River. A major spill would not only be an environmental catastrophe, it would also cripple our state's economy, costing as much as 165,000 jobs and \$10.8 billion in economic impacts. We cannot afford to leave our livelihood so unprotected.

[Senate Bill 5622](#), creating the 'Discover Pass' to access Washington State Parks and other

recreational opportunities. Due to the Great Recession and decreasing revenues, our state parks are in jeopardy. To save parks and other forms of public recreation from extensive statewide closure, I've proposed an annual, universal pass that lets the public visit lands managed by the state Parks and Recreation Commission, or the state departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife.

The "Discover Pass" would cost \$30 per year per vehicle or \$10 for day use.

As we continue to discuss the most drastic budget cuts in state history, we need to align our revenues with our expectations about our quality of life. We need to talk about not just how much our outdoor recreation services cost, but also about how much it costs to lose them. Without this legislation, we may witness widespread closure of state parks and other public facilities.

[Senate Bill 5669](#), a proposal to consolidate executive natural resource, conservation and recreation agencies. More than a simple cost-savings mechanism, this legislation symbolizes the direction we need to take state government. That means finding efficiencies and streamlining in every possible instance. By capturing efficiencies and streamlining first, critical public services and on-the-ground programs will bear a lesser impact later.

By streamlining these agencies, the proposal would save \$20 million per biennium. Adoption of this legislation is key to protecting our natural resources and our ability to enjoy them.

This is a theme that will persist in legislative efforts across the board. It's a tough conversation to have, but one that is necessary for our future.

Rest assured that I will continue to fight to do so in the name of preserving essential state services.

K-12 and higher education, the Basic Health Plan and environmental programs will all see themselves drastically reduced should cost saving measures not be found and enacted. Keeping these critical public services intact is necessary to maintaining a high quality of life today as well as a strong economy tomorrow.

Look forward to more updates from my office as session progresses. I know how important the coming events in Olympia will be to you all, so I will do my best to be available to you.

Should you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, as always, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff.

Best wishes,

Kevin Ranker

