



Senator

RODNEY TOM48th Legislative District • rodney.tom@leg.wa.gov*Session update from Olympia**February 3, 2012***Greetings.**

As we move into the fifth week of the legislative session, my 48th district seatmates and I are looking forward to meeting you at our upcoming Town Hall Meeting.

Please join us Feb. 18, to discuss progress made thus far in the 2012 legislative session, and what to expect as we try to finalize the budget. We will be answering questions from 10 a.m. to noon in the Redmond City Hall Council Chamber at 15670 Northeast 85th Street, Redmond, WA. Click [here](#) for directions.

Marriage equality passes Senate

Landmark legislation to legalize same-sex marriage passed the Senate this week on a closely watched, 28-21 vote that was a model of mutually respectful debate over an intensely personal and potentially polarizing issue. [Senate Bill 6239](#) would make Washington the seventh state in the nation, plus the District of Columbia, to eliminate the barrier to marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

The measure includes multiple protections for religious institutions and organizations that refuse to perform a marriage ceremony or provide facilities or services to a particular couple. It also clarifies that the bill does nothing to change existing law governing religious and non-profit institutions and organizations that provide adoption, foster care or other child-placement services.

The bill now goes to the House for consideration.

Pension reform introduced

Last week, I introduced a bill to close a loophole that has led to a ballooning in our state retirement systems obligations.

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Most state pension benefits are calculated as a set percentage, increasing 2 percent with each year of service. That percentage is then applied to a retiree's average salary over a 2 to 5 year period during which the retiree was paid the most.

But a loophole has allowed state employees to take advantage of the system. It's become common practice now for retirees to "sprint to the finish," racking up large sums in overtime in their last years of service. The pensions are then based off significantly larger salaries than they averaged over their careers, ballooning pension payments to the detriment of the system.



My proposal would close the loophole by excluding overtime payments from a member's base salary when calculating retirement allowance for all new hires.

While current worker's pension provisions would not change due to past court decisions, the bill would require the state actuary to calculate, and the Department of Retirement Systems to collect, supplemental pension contributions from a current member's agency employer for overtime that the member works.

Not only do we need to curtail the costs imposed on our retirement system by inflated pensions, we also need to create a disincentive when it comes to the assignment of costly overtime hours in the first place.

The focus this year must be on reform and bending the cost curve of state government so we don't come back year after year with another new budget deficit crisis.

Record tax break for Washington businesses

Washington employers will collect a record \$56 million in 2011 federal tax credits because they hired certain hard-to-place job seekers, thanks to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. What's more, even bigger tax breaks are available beginning in 2012 to encourage businesses to hire more veterans.

Businesses that hire military veterans, the disabled, ex-inmates, food-stamp recipients and others can receive up to \$2,400 in tax savings. If they hire welfare recipients, they can receive up to \$9,000 in tax credits. Employers who want to participate should contact the Employment Security Department.

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

Senate approves redistricting maps

The Washington State Senate voted Wednesday to approve new legislative and congressional boundaries for the next 10 years.

This reflects the technical changes the Redistricting Commission approved in the weeks following the plan submitted Jan. 1. The Legislature had until Feb. 7 to either take no action, adopt the plan approved by the commission, or make changes.

The new district boundaries will take effect after the 2012 general election in November.

Stay in touch

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me. I try as best as I can to give you a personal response, instead of a rubberstamping some form letter.

As always, it is an honor to serve you.

think Peace!

Rodney Tom