

Report to the 49th District



Representative
Jim Moeller
Speaker Pro Tempore

Committees:

Health Care & Wellness
Labor & Workforce Development
Rules
Transportation

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2012 Legislative Session

May 2012

Dear Friends,

We do our best to represent the diverse interests of our Clark County communities and neighborhoods. The information in these pages describes how the legislative process affected some important issues in our community.

Inside, we've detailed many legislative issues that filled most of our time in Olympia these past several months. Certainly, media resources, including the growing Internet-reporting community, have their own take on things. This newsletter is *our* take. We look forward to continuing open, honest and straightforward conversations about our past work and future challenges.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with your ideas and concerns. We want to hear from you because we always do a better job when you chime in.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Jim Moeller and Sharon Wylie in blue ink. Jim Moeller's signature is on the left and Sharon Wylie's is on the right.

Jim Moeller

Sharon Wylie



Representative
Sharon Wylie
Assistant Majority Whip

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Capital Budget
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Higher Education
Technology, Energy & Communications

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Two vital local institutions:

New accounts will strengthen School for the Blind and Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss

The Legislature approved **HB 2757**, a measure that will make a big difference for the Washington State School for the Blind and for the Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss.

My bill establishes new financial accounts for these important institutions. The two vital schools will be able to retain funds from grants and awards beyond a current budget cycle.

Since they are stand-alone agencies, the schools were prevented by our state's budgetary laws from retaining outside funds they had been awarded. The schools can now spend:

- More time solving problems to help students.
- Less time finding ways to work around accounting rules that hindered efficient and effective operations and that impeded the delivery of quality services to students.



A win for every citizen: Marriage legislation – at long last! – puts Washington on the map as latest state to stand tall for civil rights

Approval for the marriage-equality standard (**SB 6239**) in both legislative chambers – and then the governor's signature – is a momentous statement of justice and principle for every Washington citizen, family, and community.

I have felt all along that time was on our side. Time has always been on the side of doing the right thing, the principled thing for equality and justice. Yes, this story has been a very long time in the writing.

Many folks in solid, loving marriages with opposite-gender partners have come to see that the love and commitment they have in their own marriage is the same in all solid, loving relationships — that love and commitment is a meaningful gift for anyone who's lucky enough to give and get it.

Strong, healthy families promote social stability and prosperous economic growth. Couples who have obtained civil-marriage licenses have already committed themselves to one another in heart and mind. In this measure, our state meets a responsibility to establish legal, ethical, and commonsense protections that are realized in a bona-fide marriage contract.

Personally, for me, as House Speaker Pro Tempore, it was a singular honor and privilege to preside over the House of Representative deliberation leading up to final approval of the legislation.

Shopping for health care:

A new Washington law kicks in to help put federal Affordable Health Care Act's landmark consumer-protection into effect

A better way to shop for health care, and a better health-care system overall — that's what we're all hoping for in the new federal Affordable Care Act, or ACA. And this year we passed **HB 2319** to help implement the ACA here in Washington.

One big piece of this new health-care reform is the Health Benefits Exchange. The Exchange is established as a new way to buy

health coverage. Individuals and families without Medicare, Medicaid or employer-sponsored health coverage and with an income below 400-percent of the federal poverty level will be eligible for tax credits for health-care premiums. The Health Benefits Exchange will:

- Protect consumers by making it easier both to shop for health plans and to truly compare prices and quality of care.
- Provide health coverage for people who have chronic health problems or serious illnesses.
- Build reasonable standards for consumer-protection, covered services, health-care-provider selection, and financial solvency.
- Ensure that health plans sold through the Exchange include essential health benefits, such as hospital and physician care, and coverage for prescription drugs, and rehabilitation and mental-health and chemical-dependency services.



If you have kids in college or just starting out in adult life, they can get health coverage up to age 26 through your policy. The new law also (1) prohibits health plans from placing lifetime-limits on the dollar value of coverage, and (2) restricts annual limits on the dollar value of coverage, with annual limits eliminated altogether in 2014.

Health plans can neither deny children coverage based on pre-existing medical conditions nor include exclusions for pre-existing conditions for children. New or renewed health plans are required to cover preventive medicine, such as immunizations for kids.

Through a number of pathways, most Americans will have health coverage by 2014. Here are the pathways:

- A substantial expansion of Medicaid.
- Tax credits for private health coverage if it's purchased through the Health Benefits Exchange.
- New insurance rules that prevent health insurers from denying coverage or charging higher premiums to people who have pre-existing health conditions.

Representative Sharon Wylie



The long and winding session paid off

In this long and contentious session there were genuine and heartfelt differences of opinion about both causes and solutions to problems that face our state. Those differences had to be resolved either through compromise, an agreement to focus on areas of commonality, or through majority decision-making. All of these occurred, but I believe there was willingness on both sides of the aisle to examine issues that had not been addressed in the past.

The need was to balance the budget to avoid across the board cuts, so both income and spending were on the table. In the end, the budget was balanced through a combination of cuts, improvements in the economy, realistic fees and deferral of spending. The alternative was a machete approach that would have hurt more people, and increased costs to communities and local governments in the long term. My priorities going in were jobs, education funding and preserving safety net programs for our most vulnerable people. Our final budget accomplishes these things.

I worked alongside my colleagues to push for long-term spending and revenue methods that are fair, sustainable, and sufficient for the needs of our state going forward. And I used my skill and knowledge of government operations to ensure that funds are well spent and programs are as effective as possible.

Making it easier for businesses to do business with the state

The governor signed my bill, **HB 2452**, into law back in March. It focuses on how state government buys goods and services, will make the purchasing process more open, competitive, efficient and overall easier to navigate.

This measure consolidates three laws on state purchasing and three operations into the Department of Enterprise Services (DES), which manages a wide range of contracts used by both state agencies and local governments. Some of the outcomes of this fusion include:

- Bid documents and signatures may be submitted electronically, saving time and resources.
- The awarding contracts process will take into consideration the lowest bid *and* the best value.
- State agencies will still submit sole-source contracts to DES for review and approval, but they won't have to do it for personal-service contracts that are competitively bid.
- DES will maintain a public website for agencies to post information about awarded contracts.

Improving government

The best value for dollars is always a goal, but it is crucial during tough economic times. Here are some of this year's government improvements:

- **Leading by example** – Consolidating, reducing duplication and paring down administrative and support functions of the state House and Senate.

- **Less paperwork for businesses** – More options for online filing of business forms.
- **Cracking down on Medicaid fraud** – New penalties for false or fraudulent claims and whistleblower protections for those who report them.
- **Use of technology to save money and provide access to education** – More



The future of education funding

In January, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled in the McCleary decision that the state has not complied with its constitutional duty to make ample provision for the education of our students. For 30 years, the state had over a dozen complicated and overlapping education funding formulas.

After a decade of hard work **HB 2261** and **HB 2776** were signed in to law in 2009 and 2010 respectively. These measures tossed out the obsolete formulas and replaced them with a new, student-focused, transparent, and easy-to-understand funding system.

The McCleary ruling said that those two reforms, once fully implemented, represent the right course to fulfilling our paramount duty of providing our children with a quality education.

Out-of-state banks loophole finally closed

Why should big banks that are not even Washington financial institutions get away with not paying their fair share? They shouldn't and after fighting for three years to eliminate the tax exemption for big, out-of-state banks, this year the Legislature finally did and, what's more, with a bi-partisan vote.

The measure ends the special tax break and also phases out a number of other tax loopholes. I want to make sure that how we collect tax dollars and spend your money is fair and effective. This is an important start.

public school classrooms shift to online courseware and digital textbooks.

- **Less frequent license renewal** – Extending the renewal period for drivers licenses from five to six years saves money and is more convenient.
- **Reducing unfunded mandates to local governments** – Fewer reporting requirements for cities and counties provides regulatory relief.

