



2012 Legislative News

State Representative

Sharon Tomiko Santos

37th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Spring 2012

Dear Neighbor,

Now that the tough 2012 Legislative Session has ended, I am very happy to be back at home in the 37th District! This newsletter highlights some of the key issues that the Legislature confronted during our back-to-back regular and special sessions.

At the beginning of the year, the economic forecast for our state projected *another* budget deficit of more than \$1 billion, bringing the cumulative budget shortfall to more than \$10 billion since 2008 with few options left to close the gap. Reductions to state services were unavoidable and, given previous budget cuts, the intensity of the ensuing debate reflected the difficulty of our choices. In the end, we finally approved a responsible, balanced budget that:

- Protects basic education and higher education funding
- Preserves the food assistance program that helps more than 12,000 hungry low-income families each month
- Saves the Disability Lifeline and homecare support for people with disabilities
- Maintains the Community Services Block Grant, which provides critical housing, shelter, and food services to more than 690,000 people throughout Washington.

Although we minimized draconian cuts to social services this session, the challenges we faced in creating the supplemental budget underscore the need to face the reality of our revenue problem. Piecemeal efforts to raise taxes, while helpful, cannot adequately address the structural deficiencies of our tax system and, in some cases, simply reinforce its poor design. While we closed a corporate tax loophole for out-of-state banks, a modest measure to end the sales tax exemption for out-of-state residents failed to attain the supermajority vote required by Initiative 1053.

Indeed, this session well illustrated how this high standard for tax increases and our continued failure to enact real tax reform hurts our state. As taxpayers and residents who depend upon great schools, excellent health care, and safe communities, we must recognize the need for adequate tax revenues to pay for these critical public services. Initiatives like I-1053 hold us back rather than move us forward.

I believe government must adhere firmly to our fundamental values, especially during periods of great uncertainty. To this end, I remain committed to improving public education for *all* students, promoting economic development that benefits *everyone*, and championing our *universal* civil rights. I am pleased to report in this newsletter that, despite our financial woes, our state took important action on issues reflecting these priorities of our dynamic and diverse 37th Legislative District.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. Please stay in touch by calling or writing to me about the issues that concern you. I welcome hearing from you and appreciate your continued participation in our democratic process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharon Tomiko Santos". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sharon Tomiko Santos





Education

A few days before the 2012 Legislature convened, the Washington State Supreme Court issued a major ruling on education funding that dominated the remainder of our legislative deliberations. This decision affirmed that the state has failed its constitutional duty to make ample provision for education of all students in Washington state. The Court recognized, however, that the Legislature enacted important reforms in 2009 and 2010, which will correct the inadequacies in the education funding system to provide for a quality program of basic education by 2018. In an unprecedented move to assure continued progress toward the full implementation of adequate education funding, the state Supreme Court declared its intent to retain jurisdiction over this case until further notice.

Education has always been a priority to our communities and our state, and the McCleary decision helped us to prioritize education funding in the final supplemental operating budget. Thus, I am happy to report, the Legislature did not cut funding for education this session despite the enormous budget shortfall. In addition, the Legislature passed significant bills that aim to further the professional development of our teachers and principals and that promote academic success in our most challenging schools.

Teacher Principal Evaluation Program (TPEP)

In 2010, the Legislature directed the development of new evaluation systems for teachers and for principals based on four levels of performance rated by eight criteria. With the support of teachers, principals and community members, sixteen school districts volunteered to help shape and test the revised evaluation systems for statewide rollout by 2013. These pilot districts, along with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, worked diligently for 18 months to design a comprehensive and research-based model that began trial implementation last Fall. Initial reports indicate the new evaluation system is effective in providing useful information to teachers and principals about their work.

Although the *Teacher Principal Evaluation Program* (TPEP) pilot is still underway, this year some individuals and organizations sought substantial legislative changes to include the academic growth of individual students in teacher and principal performance ratings and to permit the use of evaluation results in personnel decisions such as firing, probationary placement, and school assignments. As introduced, these measures were highly controversial and required considerable modification in order to preserve the integrity of the TPEP program and to protect against the misuse and abuse of the evaluation system.

In the end, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 5895 to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to field-test the TPEP model with the pilot districts as well as to establish clear and limited parameters about the use of evaluations for unintended purposes. SB 5895 underscores that the new four-tiered evaluation system is a model of professional growth that builds upon the strengths of individual educators. The new policy also allows districts to include student data in evaluating educator effectiveness with safeguards to recognize and account for the diverse characteristics of our classrooms and communities. When fully implemented, TPEP will support our goal to put a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every schoolhouse throughout Washington state.

Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success (CSIS)



Washington is a recognized leader in innovation, including in our approaches to education. This session, the Legislature created *Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success* (CSIS) – a five-year pilot program that links colleges of education with academically struggling elementary schools. Using research-based models of teaching and learning, CSIS will focus on strategies to close the opportunity gap and improve academic achievement for all students.

The ultimate goal is to test new and creative approaches to teaching in schools where the traditional education model has struggled. CSIS will give education researchers and future teachers firsthand knowledge about the challenges of today's classrooms, helping our colleges retool in real time to meet the real learning needs of real students. Under the pilot, up to six CSIS may participate in the pilot and three of these will be eligible for state grant funding. If Collaborative Schools for Innovation and Success prove beneficial to student learning, it will be a lesson in innovation and success for all of us.

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Jobs

While our fragile national economy is showing some small signs of life, Washington state must aggressively pursue every opportunity to expand our local economy with investments and policies that produce good jobs and prepare our workers to fill these positions. This challenge is certainly difficult at a time when public resources are dwindling but is especially necessary in order to position ourselves for the future prosperity of *all* Washingtonians.

This is why I am particularly pleased that the supplemental operating budget did not reduce funding for the *Limited English Proficiency* (LEP) Pathways program. Through partnerships with community-based agencies, LEP Pathways delivers job training and vocational English language programs to refugees and immigrants enrolled in WorkFirst. This program is vital to the residents of the 37th district because, not only do state public as-

sistance records indicate great need for these services in our communities, we also have the largest population of immigrants and refugees among the legislative districts. Thanks to the advocacy of many people in the 37th district, we protected funding for LEP Pathways and preserved opportunities for our neighbors to support themselves and their families.

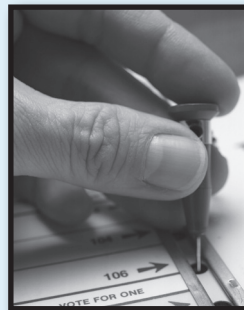
Creating new jobs is critical to our economic recovery, but so is protecting jobs already in place. This was the objective of House Bill 1832, which required new vendors at SeaTac airport to retain workers from businesses with expiring contracts for up to 90 days. As introduced, this laudable policy did not make distinctions between large national corporations that are better able to comply with this policy and small local businesses owned by women and minorities that have not achieved economies of scale and opportunity, a goal more difficult to achieve since the passage of I-200. Indeed, as a measure of comparison, SeaTac airport generated approximately \$28 billion in retail contracts in 2009 but less than one percent of those contracts were awarded to registered women or minority business enterprises.

I offered an amendment to HB 1832 that would help Washington state and the Port of Seattle retain a strong commitment to our women and minority business enterprises while preserving the intent of the original bill. Unfortunately, this language was not acceptable to the proponents of the measure so the Legislature took no action on the bill. I remain committed to working toward a policy that protects workers during a volatile economy and promotes a level playing field for WMBEs to participate in the economic growth of our state. An equal opportunity to share in and contribute to our future prosperity is a matter of economic justice both for workers and for women and minority business owners.

Civil Rights *Marriage Equality*

Two years ago, the Legislature recognized Domestic Partnerships in statute. Occasionally described as the “everything but marriage” law for same sex couples, this policy entitles registered domestic partners to all the rights and benefits accorded to married couples. Washington voters later upheld this law when a referendum on the measure qualified for the ballot. Although we celebrated this momentous accomplishment at the time, the Domestic Partnership law has proven unwieldy in the real world.

The Legislature finally struck down this “separate but equal” provision by enacting true marriage equality this year. As a co-sponsor of this historic legislation, I am proud that Washington is now among seven states in the nation to recognize same-sex marriages. As important, the bill carefully retained protections that do not hinder our fundamental religious freedoms. Religious institutions will not be compelled to violate religious principles and practices in order to recognize same-sex marriages or provide services to same-sex couples.



Voting Rights Act

As underscored during the recent hearings of the Washington State Redistricting Commission, people of color are highly under-represented at all levels of public office in Washington. The structural organization of a public body and the electoral process can contribute to this inequity as in, for example, at-large elections wherein the voices and votes of communities of color are diluted by comparison to district-based elections. The Washington Voting Rights Act of 2012 would have authorized legal remedies if at-large or district-based elections are shown to deny equal opportunities to certain classes of candidates. The ultimate intent of this legislation is to ensure that all persons have an equal opportunity to run for public office to represent their communities. Unfortunately, the Washington Voting Rights Act did not see floor action this session and will need to be re-introduced next year.

Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos - 37th Legislative District

Gang Intervention and Prevention



As illustrated by the numerous bills introduced this session, lawmakers eagerly seek solutions to solving the pervasive problem associated with gangs and gang violence that endanger our communities. Yet, we often disagree on how to best deal with this growing menace.

Substitute House Bill 2594 proposed to deter gang activity by banning certain activities in a prescribed area through a civil injunction, or court order. This policy would authorize prosecutors or the state Attorney General to request a ban on certain groups from wearing clothing in colors or depicting symbols known to be associated with gangs, gesturing or employing hand signals known to be associated with gangs, or interacting with known gang members. Violators could be found in contempt of court and subject to fines as well as jail time, whether or not the individual is suspected of direct criminal action.

In effect, this proposal would legalize “guilt by association.” The policy would sacrifice our civil liberties – freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of movement – in pursuit of community safety and security. Given that this same rationale persuaded our country to intern thousands of Japanese Americans during World War II, I find this idea reprehensible and I actively worked against it.

Incarceration is not the most effective means to change criminal behavior among youth and, in many cases, makes the problem worse. I co-sponsored House Bill 2535, which authorizes counties to establish juvenile gang courts modeled on the success of Washington state drug courts, to provide a different avenue for the recovery and rehabilitation of young gang members. Juvenile gang courts will focus on changing individual behavior by developing specific plans, which may include mental health or substance abuse treatment, as alternatives to sentencing.

The Legislature also allocated \$250,000 to start a juvenile gang prevention and intervention grant program. Administered by the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice, the grant program encourages local governments and non-profit organizations to develop effective and culturally competent strategies for getting kids out of gangs and off the streets.

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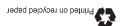
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