



2015 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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23rd Legislative District



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Dear Kitsap Friends
and Neighbors –

The kids are back in school, fall is in the air, and Washington's record-length legislative session is finally in the rear-view mirror. Good things all. I want to devote a few pages here to touch on some of what went on during those 179 days that will matter most to those of us here in the 23rd district. And, as always, I want to thank you once again for allowing me to work for you in the state Capitol. Now that I'm back home, it's a joy to attend various events, shop, visit with constituents and enjoy life in our beautiful district. Every day I'm reminded what diverse, generous, positive, and forward-looking people we are. Thank you for your trust.

Sincerely,

Sherry

Building a Better Washington

The capital budget is Washington's construction spending plan, substantially paid for by proceeds of bond sales. It's where we turn for the funds to build and renovate K-12 schools, college and university buildings, prisons, mental-health facilities, state government buildings, and state parks. Unlike the operating budget, which is often the source of extended (like this year) partisan disagreements, writing the capital budget tends to be a more congenial process, because the results are clear for all to see.

This year's \$3.9 billion capital budget will create 44,000 good jobs across the state, many of them right here at home. The capital budget invests more than \$40 million in the 23rd district, including significant allocations for the North Kitsap Fishline Foodbank, the Bremerton Children's Dental Clinic, important shoreline and inland water treatment activities, and improvements to our area parks. Of special note is a \$300,000 grant to help expand Illahee Preserve Heritage Park, a Kitsap County treasure.

One of the capital budget victories that gave me the most satisfaction this year will help make life a little easier for puppies and small dogs at the Kitsap Humane Society shelter in Silverdale. I was honored to visit the shelter in August for a celebration of the much-needed \$90,000 grant. KHS is one of the busiest shelters in the western United States, and has placed thousands of loving pets with area families – maybe even your own. The capital budget grant will help the shelter upgrade its puppy kennels, and plans also include remodeling the space to improve lighting, drainage, and ventilation. I am fortunate to share my own home with Sadie the Malamute and a gray tabby named Mr. B, and it is occasions like this that remind me of how grateful I am to be in public service.

It's hard to visit Kitsap Humane Society and not fall in love every few feet!





Healing an Ailing Mental-Health System

It's a good bet that the life of every person reading this newsletter has been touched by some form of mental illness. A brother or sister, a parent, a child, a friend or colleague... someone you know, if not you yourself, has suffered. Unfortunately, Washington's mental-health system was strained and insufficient. Something needed to be done, and I'm proud to say that your Legislature, acting in a mostly bipartisan fashion, took giant steps this session toward a fully functioning mental-health system.

- We expanded critical outpatient services for those whose mental illness does not require commitment, and included \$100 million in the budget to fund more inpatient beds, improve crisis prevention, and train more mental-health providers.
- We passed Joel's Law, named for a young man who died in an armed standoff with police while in the midst of a mental-health crisis. Joel's parents had tried desperately to get their son the help he needed, but unnecessary barriers prevented them from doing so. Thanks to Joel's Law, the people who know best – the family – will be able to get a second opinion to determine whether their loved one requires involuntary commitment.
- Another important new law also bears the name of a victim of mental illness. In the case of Sheena's Law, however, it was her estranged husband's illness, not hers. Just hours before he killed Sheena and took his own life, he had retrieved the soon-to-be murder weapon – a handgun – from police custody. It had been confiscated when he had been judged a suicide threat, but had to be returned when officers deemed him safe. Under the new law, family members will receive 72 hours' notice when a weapon is returned in these circumstances.

Silver Alert to Save Lives

Imagine your mom or dad, your husband or wife, was living with Alzheimer's. Now imagine finding out that your loved one was missing, out alone in a world he or she was no longer able to negotiate safely. It happens every day. A sad but predictable aspect of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia is the phenomenon of "wandering." Confused and disoriented seniors might believe they are setting off to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work, or going home when they are already at home. What they are really doing is heading into danger.

Today there are 200,000 elders in Washington who suffer from dementia or developmental disability, and at some point most of them will wander. They are our parents and grandparents, the people who raised us and protected us.

My Silver Alert bill, which was signed into law by Gov. Inslee on June 10, sets up an emergency notification process to be used when seniors with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, as well as other developmentally disabled persons over 60, go missing. I felt we owed it to them to take this simple step that 41 states had already taken.

Now when a vulnerable senior goes missing, an Endangered Missing Persons Advisory will be sent to area media outlets and law enforcement agencies, and motorists will see a Silver Alert flashing on the programmable message signs that are

on many Washington highways. Just like the AMBER Alerts for missing children, Silver Alerts work.



Photo: Drew Mikkelsen/KING5

Just as this newsletter was going to press, the Silver Alert system was activated to help find a missing 83-year-old Everett man who suffers from Alzheimer's. I'm so grateful to

say that the system worked! Thanks to numerous calls from motorists who spotted his car, he was located and safely returned to his family less than 24 hours after signs flashed on Washington interstates.

A Balanced, Sustainable State Budget

It took a while, but when the 2015 Legislature adjourned this summer, we did so with a bipartisan operating budget that reflects, in many ways, the values of the people of Washington. It's a budget that makes record investments in education and mental-health care, does good things for the foster children and foster parents of our state, and provides increased services for ailing seniors and persons with developmental disabilities, just to point out a few areas.



Pi sculpture at Olympic College Bremerton

Here are just a few highlights.

- \$1.3 billion in new investments in our K-12 public schools, the largest increase in state history. This moves us closer to our goal of fully funding basic education, reduces class sizes in kindergarten through 3rd grade, expands all-day kindergarten, and pays for educational basics like textbooks and operating costs.
- Reduced college and university tuition for the first time. This applies to students at technical and community colleges like Olympic as well as regional and state colleges and universities. A college education should be a realistic option for every student who works hard, and while we need to find ways to drive costs down even further, this is a good start. I tip my hat to my 23rd-district seatmate, Rep. Drew Hansen, who chairs the House Higher Education Committee and has been instrumental in expanding options for aspiring students.
- \$41 million in scholarships for high-demand, high-reward majors in science, technology, engineering, math, and healthcare.
- Mending the state's frayed safety net: Investing in emergency food assistance, affordable housing, improved healthcare for children and low-income seniors, expanded services for foster families.
- Record investment in early learning – proven to be the single best way to close Washington's opportunity gap and set every child on the road to success in school, and in life.

There is far too much in the 475-page spending plan to do justice to in this limited space, but if you have specific questions or want more information on particular areas of the budget, please contact my office and we'll help you get the answers.



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Serving Those Who Serve

I'm privileged to chair the House Community Development, Housing, and Tribal Affairs Committee in the Legislature. Although it's not mentioned in that long title, one of the most important functions of my committee is to develop and perfect legislation that benefits Washington's hundreds of thousands of veterans and active-duty military personnel, as well as their families.

I'm proud to say that this year we passed legislation to

- launch a campaign to increase veteran employment in the private sector;
- expand access to higher education for veterans and their dependents;
- learn how we can make it easier for disabled vets and their family members to improve their medical insurance coverage;
- prioritize hiring of veterans for state jobs;
- prevent the tragedy of suicide among our veterans; and
- create a Helmets to Hardhats program coordinator within the Department of Veterans Affairs to help vets get good-paying construction jobs.

I want to make a special mention of a good bill sponsored by our 23rd-district senator, Christine Rolfes, that will employ the state's Veterans Conservation Corps to survey critical fish populations in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.