

# Report to the 19th District

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Sen. Brian Hatfield    Rep. Brian Blake    Rep. Dean Takko

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Dear Friends,

The legislative session has concluded and it's good to be home. We are pleased to report that, for the first time since 2009, the legislature managed to complete our work ahead of our 60-day timeline.

The bipartisan supplemental budget we passed this year included some important victories for coastal communities.

- \$58 million for our public schools, in addition to the \$1 billion we invested last year.
- Over \$32 million to improve our communities' capacity to treat the mentally ill.

We hope this newsletter brings you up-to-speed on some of the issues we've been working on in Olympia.

It's our honor to represent you in our state capitol. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your questions or ideas.

All the best,

*Brian Hatfield*    *Br. E. Blake*    *Dean A. Takko*

Sen. Brian Hatfield

Rep. Brian Blake

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## Mental health care: a priority for rural Washington

Our state has long led the nation when it comes to mental health care. Last year we opened the doors to quality, affordable health care for thousands, and years before that we made mental health care the rule — not the exception.

But much is left to be done. We are still failing to meet the needs of individuals battling mental illness. In recent years,



we've seen the ramifications of our shortcomings in this critical area.

This isn't just a problem that you hear about on the news or read about in the paper — mental illness can happen to anybody.

It's clear where Washington families turn when they are dealing with a broken leg or a concussion. It's less clear where

they turn when a child is debilitated by panic attacks or when a parent is paralyzed by depression.

One of the budget investments we are most proud of is the nearly \$33 million we dedicate to improving our communities' capacity to treat the mentally ill, mental health treatment for high-needs children and making critical improvements to our state hospitals.

While this landmark investment is a step in the right direction, there is always more we can do. We'll keep fighting for continued progress in this critical area in coming years.

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## On fulfilling our paramount duty

Our constitution says that providing education to all Washington children is the state's paramount duty. The Supreme Court stated we are not fulfilling our first responsibility and, in its McCleary decision, mandated a significant boost in K-12 school investments toward fully funding basic education by 2018. We're talking about at least \$5 billion in additional funding for the 2017-2018 budget, which is an increase of one third over what we currently spend on K-12.

Are things that bad on the education front? In 1992 Washington ranked 24th in class sizes, and the most recent tally puts our state at 47th out of the 50 states. This means Washington's average student-to-teacher ratio is the fourth highest in the nation, so you be the judge.

The Legislature passed an education reform package in 2009. But the best education overhaul in the nation doesn't do any good if you don't fund it, and that's exactly what happened, which is one of the reasons that we now have a Supreme Court mandate.

In looking for ways to provide our kids with the necessary tools to succeed in the global economy we've come up with good, solid, creative solutions. But having them meet opposition at every turn has made reaching results a grueling exercise in frustration.

Case in point, this session we proposed closing tax loopholes for huge oil companies to funnel more funds toward education. Another idea was to sell \$700 million in lottery-backed bonds for classroom construction, and another option was to sell \$825 million in general-obligation bonds to modernize STEM facilities, fund all-day kindergarten and reduce K-3 class sizes. These and other projects to help us comply with the Supreme Court's ruling were turned down by the Republican-led Senate.

Another disappointment was the Republican-led Senate's failure to support the voter-approved cost-of-living adjustments for teachers. Despite overwhelming Democratic support in both chambers, teachers will go without COLAs for the sixth year in a row.

## Some of this session's victories

- To improve the conditions of our state's waterways, we tackled the problem of derelict and abandoned boats and ships that leak oil and other pollutants into the water. HB 2457 helps reduce taxpayer burden by strengthening the state's Derelict Vessel Removal Program.
- To ensure small rural hospitals can serve their communities for generations to come, SB 5859 creates a classification for certain rural hospitals to align state Medicaid reimbursement rates with Federal Medicare compensation rates, providing these hospitals much-needed financial relief from the hardship caused by the Great Recession.
- To expedite the removal of fish passage barriers in our region and provide relief from burdensome regulations, HB 2251 makes it easier to complete projects with the highest value to fish habitat in our counties and towns.