

Rep. Brian Blake

2018 Legislative Report to the 19th District



Spring 2018



Rep. Brian Blake

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Dear friends,

It's good to be back home after an intense and productive legislative session. We fixed the **Hirst** issue, approved four budgets, complied with the **McCleary** mandate, secured **\$300 million for mental health care**, and passed numerous measures that **put people first** and will make a difference for families across the state, all within 60 days. Yes, this is our job as lawmakers, but finishing on time has not been the norm the last few years.

One of the most important decisions made this session was passing a one-time **\$391 million property tax cut** for 2019 to help homeowners whose taxes increased way more than expected. Next year, they will see a reduction in both their state property tax and their local school levy property taxes.

Since there isn't enough room to talk about every issue, if there's something specific you're interested in, or you want more information on any of the bills discussed here, please contact my office at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for giving me the honor of serving you,

Brian

K-12 Education/McCleary

Our most significant investment in 2018 was **\$1 billion additional dollars for public schools** to fully fund teacher salaries by the 2018-19 school year as ordered by the Supreme Court. I believe these funds will finally resolve the McCleary litigation. Our education bill ([ESSB 6362](#)) also includes:

- \$100 million for special education.
- \$51 million to recruit and retain talented educators.
- \$8 million for Science Standards Pro Learning.
- 4 percent increase in state salary for highly qualified teachers beginning in 2019-20.
- Creating greater stability high poverty districts by using a three-year average to determine eligibility for extra funding.
- Providing more transparency about how public education dollars are spent.





Rural Economic Development

Last year I, along with several colleagues and the Speaker of the House, went on a rural development tour to discuss ideas to boost development in timber and farm country. While I believe there's much more to do, these are some of the steps we took this session to put us on the right path toward that goal:

Strengthening infrastructure

The [construction budget](#) makes investments in education and infrastructure, including rural access to broadband internet; roads, water lines and local infrastructure; community revitalization grants; clean water projects; historical preservation; and fish habitat improvements.

The [transportation budget](#) includes funding for fish culverts and barrier removals to help salmon runs recover; consolidating transit grants to rural communities; and connecting our communities with new bridges, overpasses and railroad crossings.

High demand jobs training

Right now there are more family-wage jobs available than qualified people to fill them. We addressed this skills gap by passing a program that gives a boost to our small towns and rural areas with an investment of **\$1 million** toward the state's share of a public-private partnership offering scholarships at community colleges in rural counties. The program is aimed at high-demand fields in each region such as firefighting, nursing, carpentry, and forestry and timber jobs.

Small businesses

To encourage small businesses and economic growth, we passed bills that certify creative districts to promote cultural facilities, creative industries, or arts-related businesses; clarify regulatory rights of small businesses; expedite Environmental Impact Statements; and support local fairs, all of which create family wage jobs and increase opportunities in communities with deteriorating economies.

Net Neutrality

The federal government for years guaranteed net Neutrality protections, but the Federal Communications Commission announced in December that it would rescind them. I may not be the most internet-savvy person around, but I know enough to realize that was bad news. To ensure net neutrality protections for Washingtonians we passed [HB 2282](#) and became the first state in the nation to establish a solution at the state level. Under the new law, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are prohibited from:

- Blocking customers' access to lawful content
- "Throttling," or slowing down lawful content
- Favoring certain content over others due to "paid prioritization"



Equal Pay Opportunity Act

Women make up almost half of the workforce yet, in Washington, over the course of 40 years of work the average woman will earn almost half a million less than her male counterpart will. I have supported a version of this bill since it was first introduced in 2015, so I'm glad the **Equal Pay Opportunity Act, HB 1506**, finally made it to the governor's desk. This new law updates, for the first time since 1943, the Washington State Equal Pay Act by:

- Prohibiting pay secrecy policies
- Allowing discussion of wages
- Preventing discrimination by gender in providing opportunities
- Banning retaliation against workers who file complaints, discuss wages or seek advancement opportunities
- Ensuring workers are entitled to remedies in the event of violations



Addressing student loans

Nearly 800,000 Washingtonians are currently paying off their college education. Each of them, on average, has a student loan of around \$24,000. We passed three measures to help both, borrowers who are struggling to keep up with their payments, and current students who may not fully understand the extent of their loans until it's time to start paying them back.

• Student Opportunity, Assistance, and Relief Act

When people default on their loan payments, the state can revoke their professional license or garnish 25 percent of their paychecks. These actions make it even more difficult – if not impossible – to pay back the loans. **HB 1169**

Protections against sexual harassment

Prominent sexual harassment incidents across the country and the **#MeToo** movement have highlighted the need for protections in the workplace. We passed three bills that will lead to more truth and justice for victims.

- **SB 5996** prohibits nondisclosure agreements that prevent workers from disclosing sexual harassment or sexual assault from being a condition of employment.
- **SB 6471** calls for the development of model policies to create workplaces that are safe from sexual harassment.
- **SB 6068** sheds light on repeat sexual harassers by removing barriers to lawsuits created by non-disclosure agreements.

repeals license suspension, lowers the interest for unpaid private student loan debt, and lowers the percentage that can be garnished.

• Student Loan Transparency Act

SB 5022 protects student borrowers who, in many cases, struggle with confusing information and often end up taken advantage of by scammers. The new law requires institutions of higher education to provide notices to students detailing their loan balances and estimated monthly payments each time a financial aid package that includes a new or revised student loan is offered.

• Student Loan Bill of Rights

SB 6029 establishes a range of provisions designed to protect Washingtonians from deceptive or predatory practices and requires student loan servicers to obtain licenses to operate in the state. It also establishes a Student Education Loan Advocate to aid borrowers, compile data, provide information on student loans, and receive, review, and take action on complaints from borrowers.

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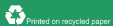
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Committees

Agriculture &
Natural Resources (*Chair*)

Business &
Financial Services

Commerce & Gaming



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Tackling the opioid epidemic

The opioid crisis is an epidemic that not only affects individuals; it's breaking up families and impacting communities. I believe the passage of [HB 1047](#), a **statewide Drug Take-Back Program**, will encourage the return of unused prescription drugs – keeping them away from people, especially our youth, who might misuse them.

