A Report from the 2006 Legislative Session

To my constituents in the 17th Legislative District

Representative Jim Dunn, *R-Vancouver*

REPRESENTATIVE
JIM DUNN

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Winter 2006

Dear Neighbors,

I hope this newsletter finds the New Year treating you well.

The **2006 legislative session** began on **January 9** and is scheduled to run **60 calendar days.** This session promises to be an interesting one as we pass a supplemental budget and address our health care, economic, education, and state government challenges – among other issues.

My priorities as your state representative remain the same as the day you elected me to office: **creating and preserving jobs**, increasing availability of **affordable housing**, **strengthening public education**, and **holding government accountable**.

I believe it is important to stay in touch with you throughout the year. Unfortunately, this will be one of only two newsletters I will be able to send you this year due to election-year restrictions. However, I am still allowed to respond should you contact me about anything – and feel free to!

I would like to thank all of you who have contacted me with your comments, concerns and questions since I have been in office. **Your input is valuable** and I consider our interactions to be an important part of my job.

I enjoy being **your state representative – it is an honor and privilege to serve you**. Please contact me if I can ever be of assistance.

Respectfully,

Jim Dunn
State Representative, 17th Disrict

HOUSE COMMITTEES:

Children & Family Services

Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade

Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade Work Group

Higher Education & Workforce Education

Housing
Assistant Ranking Republican

GROUPS, COUNCILS AND OTHER COMMITTEES:

Washington State:
Family Policy Council

Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Advisory Committee

Tourism Advisory Committee

Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee

American Legislative Exchange Council – Washington, D.C.:
Education Task Force

Commerce, Insurance & Economic Development Task Force

National Conference of State Legislatures – Denver, Colorado
Caucus of Native American Legislators

Representative Jim Dunn

DISTRICT 17

Using our tax dollars wisely

One of the primary responsibilities of state legislators in the 2006 legislative session is to pass a **supplemental budget** – which is a **midcourse adjustment** to our state's two-year **operating budget**.

As I noted in my last newsletter, **I did not vote for the state operating budget** because it failed to meet payment obligations, took from dedicated accounts, shifted money around, and increased taxes on cigarettes, liquor, gasoline, and some families who lose a loved one. Recent **economic forecasts show** us **these tax increases were not necessary**.

When added all up, our current budget is **a 12.4 percent increase in state spending** during a time when our state was just beginning to rebound from a slow economy.

It is important we are **fiscally responsible** with our supplemental budget – as with all our state budgets. This means making sure state legislators are **accountable for our tax dollars** and that they **find areas of savings** where they can.

The the majority party in the Legislature, who currently control the budget process, seem to be on a **spending spree**. They see a few extra dollars and cannot think of enough ways to spend it. This is disconcerting as recent economic forecasts show Washington benefiting from a national upturn in the economy. This means we may have a budget surplus in the future.

However, just because we have extra money does not mean we have to spend it. In fact, we should **create a constitutional "rainy day" fund** to protect our state's financial well-being during economic downturns. This is similar to what families do when they save for future emergencies.

The bottom line is state legislators are spending our tax dollars – and they should do so **wisely** and **responsibly**.

Preparing our students for the future

Our K-12 public school system is funded through a mix of state and federal funds and local taxes. Nearly **half of the state's general fund is dedicated** to paying for this system.

Despite our **investment in public education**, our high school graduation rates and WASL scores are causing concern. In fact, some people even characterize them as a looming crisis. **I am an optimist** and think we can steer clear from major problems, but it is going to take **accountability from everyone**.

65 percent to the classroom

There are varying opinions on how to address our graduation rates and WASL scores. Although I have concerns about the WASL, I believe it is here to stay.

One new idea that has caught my attention is the **"65 percent to the classroom"** concept. This calls for 65 percent of public school funding to go **directly to classroom instruction.**

The 65 percent concept **does not require greater taxes**. It simply **ensures a proper amount is going into the classroom** – where it is needed. This is important because **more money is not the answer – but more accountability is.**

The goal is for each school district to **spend at least 65 percent of its operating budget on classroom instruction**. Classroom instruction includes: classroom teachers, personnel, general instruction supplies, instructional aides, activities (field trips, athletics, music, arts) and private institutions for special needs students.

Outside the classroom expenses include: administration, operations, maintenance, food services, transportation, instructional support (including librarians), teacher training, and student support (nurses and counselors, etc.).

If we are going to truly **prepare our students** for **trades, higher education**, and to become **good citizens**, we need to **ensure money is making it to the classroom**. It is more important students learn **math, reading** and **writing skills** than some of the more peripheral things we are currently spending money on outside the classroom.

School boards are free to spend as they please, but 65 percent must make it into the classroom. **I believe strongly in local control of schools** and would not support this concept unless I was certain local control was protected.

2006 Legislative Session

Rep. Jim Dunn addresses the House of Representatives.

Allowing health care to be more affordable, accessible

There are still too many of our families and friends who either cannot obtain health insurance – or cannot afford coverage. We can only hope more is done in the 2006 legislative session than was done in the 2005 session.

We need **market-based solutions** – not new, costly government programs – to address our health care crisis. If we are going to fully address the problems driving our health care costs, we need to:

- **Prioritize costly state health care insurance mandates** that drive up costs for everyone;
- Clear the way for **health savings accounts** that allow people to stretch their health care dollars;
- Allow insurance companies to provide **health care policies tailored to specific needs** of individuals and families; and
- Enact **meaningful regulatory reforms** that **foster competition** and allow for a stable health insurance market.

Preparing for natural disasters

Mother Nature unleashed a natural fury in the name of Hurricane Katrina – with devastating results rarely seen before. As a former resident of Louisiana, it hurt to see the immense human suffering from this disaster. My **heart and prayers go out to all the victims** of this catastrophe.

If there is one thing I learned in my days in Louisiana, it is the people there are resilient, strong and capable of recovering from this disaster. **I want to personally thank all of you who in any way contributed to relief efforts**. Your generosity is appreciated by so many people.

Hurricane Katrina is also a **reminder that our region is susceptible to major natural disasters**. Whether it is earthquakes, tsunamis or volcanic eruptions, it is imperative our local, state and federal authorities are **prepared to react** with the appropriate amount of rescue, shelter, food, water, and health care services. **As your state representative, I will do all I can to ensure we are prepared at the state level**.

Marvin Nauman/FEMA photo

Visiting our beautiful Capitol Building

Our beautiful Capitol Building is open to the public and I encourage you to come up and visit this special and historic building. **Please contact me if you will be in Olympia during the legislative session – I would be happy to meet with you**. This website will be helpful if you plan a trip: **http://www.ga.wa.gov/visitor/index.html**

Helping small employers to grow

Washington is experiencing the benefits of a **national upturn in the economy**. Yet, **our state's business climate is not where it needs to be.** In fact, it is downright stifling.

Just ask any small employer and they will tell you they **face too many state regulations**, a **high minimum wage, uncertainty** in our **unemployment insurance system**, and an **unfair B&O tax**.

An important **first step** to helping our employers is **reforming state government**. If applied correctly, we can reform state government in a way that **does not compromise worker health and safety**, nor harm the environment.

What our **employers need is certainty** – and this can be accomplished through a legislative-driven **growth and opportunity package**. For example, we must **remove** unnecessary and costly **regulatory hurdles** by creating **one-stop licensing, information** and **assistance**. We should also extend tax incentives for start-ups and small employers.

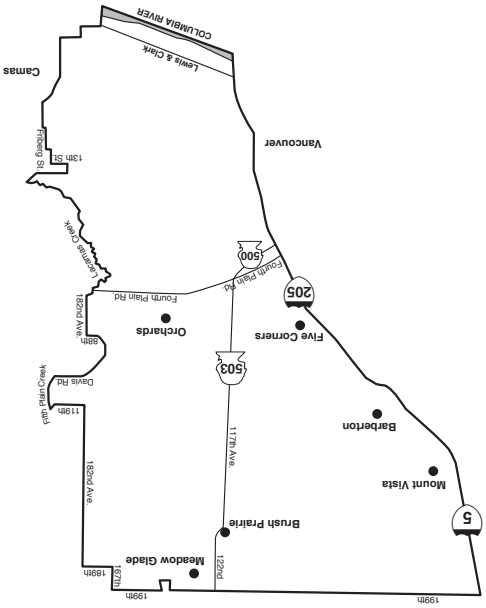
Resources on the Internet

If you need information about state government, you may find the following Internet sites to be great resources. Or, you can always call or e-mail my office.

hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/dunn/pressroom.htm – offers my views and news releases on various issues.

access.wa.gov – provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing car tabs and much more.

leg.wa.gov – offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you'd want to know about the Legislature.



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