



Legislative Update - April 30th, 2014

Greetings,

We adjourned this legislative session in March on time and on budget. During the following weeks, the Governor signed various bills passed by the Legislature, and I had the opportunity to see some of the bills I sponsored or their companion bills signed into law. Our work on the budget this year was challenging, but the version delivered to the Governor passed with an overwhelming majority, 48-1 in the Senate. This session my focus has been to make our government more efficient and create a climate where businesses can thrive and create jobs. I have also worked with my colleagues to make sure that the state is meeting its obligation to fund basic education. More than two-thirds of the new revenue has gone to funding basic education in this year's supplemental operating budget. In addition to these successes, our community will see real benefits in terms of increased school funding, more efficient forest land management and, most importantly, no new taxes.

It is an honor to serve as your state senator. If you have any questions or concerns please reach out to my office.

John Braun,

20th District Senator



Contact Me

Email:

[**John.Braun@leg.wa.gov**](mailto:John.Braun@leg.wa.gov)

Olympia Office:

103 Irv Newhouse Building

PO Box 40420

Olympia, WA 98504-0420

Phone:

(360) 786-7638

Website:

[**www.senatorjohnbraun.com**](http://www.senatorjohnbraun.com)

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Sponsored Legislation

As I mentioned, there were several bills that the Governor recently signed into law. I continue to work toward the goal of making our state the best place in the nation to live and work. Please see below for more information on some of these bills.

Forest Land Management

The Governor signed [Senate Bill 6180](#) into law which changes how counties can administer forest land and open space timber programs. This legislation allows counties the option to merge the two programs for more efficient and cost effective administration. Both programs are forestry related and the legislation will remove duplicative accounting while maintaining levels of tax revenue, and property owners will not have the added costs associated with some of the transfers.

The state should be doing everything it can to let communities plan and manage their forestry programs as efficiently as possible. This legislation is a simple improvement to burdensome land management practices and allows counties to better manage their forestry programs without negatively impacting residents.

Lewis County Assessor Dianne Dorey noted the benefits if commissioners choose to participate. "This bill will save time for us. We don't know the direct savings yet as the Board of County Commissioners will decide whether or not we participate. If we do, we will be able to manage parcels with more efficiency by not having to dually assess property values and have property owners transfer between programs. Lewis County has one fifth of the acreage that is currently in the Open Space Timber program in Washington State. Property owners will not have to deal with the cost and time of

transferring between programs when their land falls below twenty acres.”

The bill places no requirements on counties to adopt changes; rather it lets them opt in. The bill also reduces the minimum size for land to be designated forest land from twenty acres to five.

State Tourism

Earlier this session, I introduced [Senate Bill 6195](#) that would create a task force to study how the state can better market the state’s tourism industry. Tourism is the fourth largest export industry in the state and accounts for more than 150,000 jobs. The governor signed the [House companion to my bill](#) that directs the Washington Tourism Alliance to identify sustainable private funding sources for the state’s tourism marketing needs.

In 2011 the Washington State Tourism Commission was defunded due to budgetary constraints. The commission’s purpose was to find ways to expand tourism in the state with public and private stakeholders. Since the commission was defunded, Washington has been the only state in the nation without a state-funded tourism office.

We need to expand and promote the tourism opportunities in our state, because they are such an important part of our economy. However, when identifying what government should do, I think we can look to the private sector to step up and find a sustainable solution for marketing our state’s tourism industry.

Timber Revenues Restored to Schools

Budget negotiations resulted in the restoration of revenues to rural districts from forestry activities on federal lands. Our local school districts will receive more than \$350,000 under this legislation. The [measure](#) partially eliminates reductions in basic education funding for low-income districts.

This bill, along with funding in the supplemental operating budget, lets our resources go back into our local communities.

The proposed funding fluctuates yearly depending on forestry activities and now depends on federal action to reauthorize distribution of those funds. Currently, twenty-one percent of Washington is designated as national forests which are exempt from property tax. Rural districts have relied on timber sales and revenues from logging on federal land, but the state retains authority in how those funds are allocated.

With this legislation we’ve been able to put funding back into the schools and communities that need it most.

Session Review

Although we were able to accomplish quite a bit in this short session, there is still a lot of work left to do. We are facing the serious issue of funding our state's basic education needs. I am already working with other legislators to find ways to accomplish this goal when the next session begins in January of 2015. The budget that the Governor signed is a testament to the change in the way we do business in Olympia. With broad bipartisan support, we have been able to invest in education, hold the line on college tuition increases, and keep the budget balanced for four years without raising taxes. I'm committed to ensuring the kinds of results that prioritize our resources.

