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March 2, 2013

Supreme Court makes it easier to raise your taxes!

You may have read the headlines already, but the Washington State Supreme Court has ruled that the two-thirds majority requirement in the Legislature to raise taxes is unconstitutional. This ruling goes against the clear will of the people, who have voted in favor of requiring a two-thirds majority for tax increases five times in the past 20 years (four initiatives and one referendum). Most recently, Initiative 1185 passed overwhelmingly in 45 of the 49 legislative districts in the state. In our 8th District, it garnered more than 69% approval (Initiative 1053, the identical measure upon which the Supreme Court ruled Thursday, passed by 70% in our district).



My commitment to the people of the 8th District to NOT raise taxes remains as firm as ever. It is crystal clear to me (and many of my colleagues, both Republican and Democrat) that the people want the Legislature to have a very good reason to raise taxes; so good, in fact, that two-thirds of each body support that reason. Through multiple votes taken across the state, the people have said this is the wrong time to raise taxes and I remain steadfast in my belief that that conviction should be upheld.

Thursday's decision reiterates how important our bipartisan [Majority Coalition Caucus](#) is in the Senate. While some lawmakers in Olympia see this decision as a green light to start proposing tax increases, it is highly unlikely that any tax increase will pass the Senate thanks to the Majority Coalition's commitment to fiscal stability.

Several of my bills pass cutoff

Yesterday was the final day fiscal bills could be considered by the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Transportation Committee. From this point forward, only bills deemed "necessary to implement the budget" can continue to be heard in committees. We'll be spending the next several weeks debating and passing bills in the Senate chamber until March 13, the last day to consider bills in their houses of origin. As of right now, these are my bills that are alive and making their way through the legislative process:



SB 5701 would allow the state Professional Educator Standards Board to investigate and initiate action against teachers who submit fraudulent test scores. Because many teacher certifications are offered in a nonproctored setting, it is sometimes easy for people to cheat. *Passed by the full Senate March 1, now in the House of Representatives.*

SB 5718 would require the Legislature to monitor the progress of that action plan and give the OCIO until November to provide the Legislature with a plan for establishing performance benchmarks and for measuring the results of implementing the one-stop business portal. *Passed by the full Senate March 1, now in the House of Representatives.*

SB 5679 would help improve the state's business climate and stimulate job creation by requiring the Department of Ecology, the Department of Labor and Industries and the Department of Health to annually perform a formal review of their rules and establish a process for effectively retiring rules when applicable. *Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.*

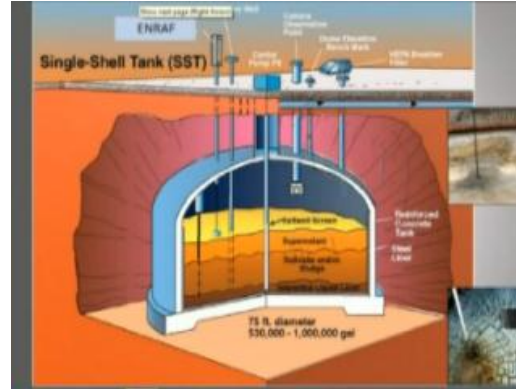
SB 5680 would promote economic development and reform the state's Business Licensing Service, the state's primary business-licensing portal, by removing two agencies and adding 16 to the list required to provide all their licenses online through the BLS website. *Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.*

SB 5705 would essentially treat abated taxes the same as refunded taxes so that funds received by a property taxing authority – raised for the purposes of filling the budget gap left by refunds or reimbursement for abated taxes – would not reduce the taxing district's levy authority, thereby aligning the law between tax refunds and tax abatements. *Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.*

SB 5648 would allow utilities greater flexibility to meet conservation and eligible renewable targets and consumers' energy needs in the most prudent and cost-effective manner. It would encourage energy conservation and remove some of the burden electric consumers are currently facing by helping to stabilize electric prices, increase conservation and create high-quality local jobs. *Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.*

Senate committee hears update on leaking Hanford tanks

The Senate Energy, Environment and Telecommunications Committee held a special hearing Thursday to learn more about the recently reported leaks from six underground radioactive waste storage tanks at the U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford Site. [You can watch video of the entire meeting here.](#)



This was an opportunity for members of the Senate to get a detailed report about what's in those tanks, why they're suspected of leaking, how the feds are responding and what it all means for the Columbia River. Once we have that information we'll have a better feel for what if anything can be done from a legislative perspective to address the situation.

These tanks were never intended to be in use for this long and it's not a secret that the tanks are leaking. However, given the gravity of the situation and the enormity of the issues involved, it is exceedingly important that we continue the discussion with the state Department of Ecology to ascertain the most effective and efficient method of cleanup. I want to see this problem solved sooner rather than later, just as people all around our state do, so I'm looking forward to working with the department.

In addition to a briefing from representatives from Ecology, which oversees Hanford cleanup on the state's behalf, a project director from Bechtel National gave us an update about Hanford's Waste Treatment Plant project and plans to convert the waste now stored in underground tanks into glass that can be sent away for storage at a long-term repository.

Senate honors Seattle Seahawks and Coach Pete Carroll

With a roar reminiscent of the Seattle Seahawks' famous "12th man" all 49 members of the Washington State Senate approved my resolution honoring the National Football League team for their 2012 season. As a huge Seahawks fan myself, I was excited to sponsor [Senate Resolution 8624](#) and even more thrilled that coach Pete Carroll was at the Senate Rostrum when it passed!

During my floor speech, I got to share a little-known fact that Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson used to play second base for the minor-league Tri-City Dust Devils from 2010 to 2011. The Tri-Cities is proud to have been the home of such an outstanding athlete, even if just for a short time. You can watch video of the resolution and my floor speech here:



The 'Hawks far exceeded the expectations of many of us – even the so-called "experts" – and showed all of us how far you can get by working together as a team. They are an inspiration to many and a shining example for our youth, and I was proud to be able to honor the team with this resolution.



Led by Carroll, the Seahawks posted an 11-5 record and made the National Football Conference playoffs as the wild card. During their epic playoff run, the Seahawks won two consecutive games by scores of 58-0 and 50-17, a total combined margin of victory of 91 points. That feat hadn't been accomplished in more than 70 years.



I especially want to thank Carlos and Aleeza Martinez, Sergio and Anthony Rodriguez, Jesus Melendez, Chris Phillips, Douglas Smith, Stephen Hudson, and Ronald Hayden for driving all the way to Olympia from the Tri-Cities for the resolution.

In closing...

A big priority for me is getting your feedback as often as possible. It is one of the best tools I have to help me better represent you. I value your opinion highly and - as always - if you would like to contact me you can write, phone, e-mail, or stop by. It remains my honor to serve you in the Washington State Senate.

Sincerely,



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