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MAY 20, 2013

As special session begins, focus still on budget

One week into the first "special session" of the Legislature and I'm working hard to make sure that the 2013-15 state budget doesn't include any new or increased taxes. Last week mostly consisted of **budget negotiations**, **ceremonial bill signings** and **meetings of policy committees**, and now there are just three weeks left in the 30-day session to reach consensus.

The [Majority Coalition Caucus](#), a Republican-dominated alliance of fiscally conservative state senators, approved a bipartisan budget during the regular session that was **balanced** and made substantial new **investments in basic and higher education** without new taxes. However, the House and governor are insisting on tax increases as a part of their proposals, which is why budget discussions are ongoing.

I've been busy connecting with constituents, the news media and stakeholder groups from across Washington to explain our fight for **a budget that does not raise taxes on the families and employers of our state**.

The fact is that as Washington emerges from the recent recession, state revenues are anticipated to grow at a rate of around 7 percent, with total tax receipts for the coming two-year budget cycle anticipated to reach \$32.8 billion – **the highest level in state history**. Despite this, the governor and majority party in the House of Representatives continue to **demand nearly a billion dollars' worth of new taxes**.

As negotiations continue, I will remain committed to finding agreement –



without being rushed into any deal that compromises our principles or our promises to Washington's citizens.

If you're interested in learning more about the current budget dynamic, you can **watch the recent TVW interview** with two members of our coalition's leadership team, Sens. [Rodney Tom](#) and [Mark Schoesler](#). In the interview, the pair explains how the House Democrats' budget proposal is out of balance by \$426 million over the next two years alone – when state law requires a budget to balance against four years' worth of revenue projections. They also discuss our coalition's priorities for the upcoming special session, which focuses on **jobs, education and the budget**. Watch the interview by clicking [here](#) or on the image.

Budget challenges, job creation go hand-in-hand

Last month the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics released its quarterly update of unemployment rates by state over the past year. Under the broadest of its measures, which takes into account "discouraged" workers who are no longer actively seeking work, **Washington ranked fifth-highest in the nation in unemployment.**

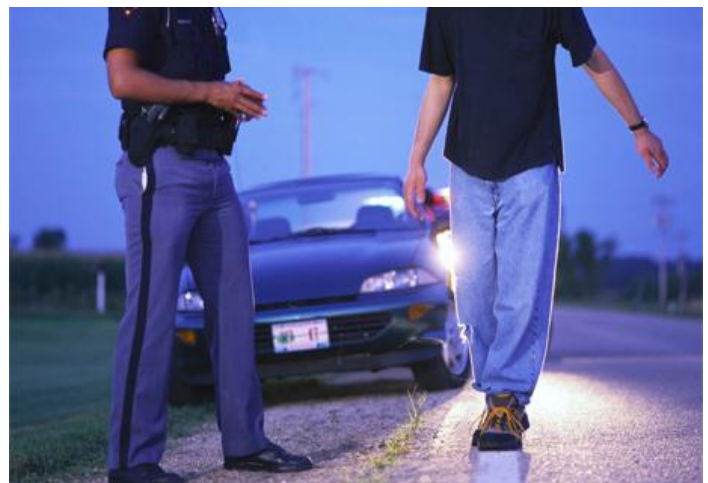
That dismal ranking is proof of the continued need to focus on job creation as our state recovers from the recent recession. Legislation passed by the Senate's bipartisan coalition during the regular session would greatly contribute to building the business-friendly climate Washington employers need.



The fact is, if more Washingtonians were back at work we may find it easier negotiating a budget. As you know, I've proposed numerous bills that would help spur our economy by putting people back to work. [Click here to read my recent editorial in the Tri-City Herald](#) about my government-streamlining proposals that would help our state's private employers find more time and resources to invest in their businesses.

DUI bill approved by Senate committee

A rash of recent high-profile accidents and fatalities caused by drunk drivers has helped bring focus to what can be done to **crack down on those found to be driving under the influence.** Legislation has been brought forward to address the issue, with a particular focus on protecting pedestrians and other motorists from repeat offenders.



Those efforts took a big step forward this week when on Tuesday, the [Senate Law and Justice Committee](#) unanimously backed [Senate Bill 5912](#), a bill that would make **sweeping changes in state law** concerning the crime of driving under the influence.

I'll let you know more about that bill as it makes its way through the legislative process.

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,



Sharon Brown
State Senator
8th District

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