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Budget negotiations continue despite sticking points

The second week of the 2013 special legislative session was marked by ongoing budget negotiations. Representatives from all four caucuses plus the governor's office - known as the "five corners" - have been working on coming to agreement on certain issues. One area of contention is assumptions that are made in the Senate and House budget proposals...for example, **how much savings can the state expect if a certain reform is implemented?**

I remain focused on adopting a budget that makes substantial investments in education and balances without general tax increases on our state's families and employers. Residents in our district are stretched thin enough as it is and don't need any more tax burdens heaped upon them by the state. While I'm encouraged that budget negotiations are continuing, **I'm not going to support any compromise proposal that includes new revenue.** I only hope budget negotiators can find the courage to cut wasteful spending rather than simply reaching deeper into your pocket.



How Vancouver's Columbia River Crossing will affect you

The governor spent most of last week negotiating with budget writers and signing bills that passed during the regular legislative session. While his autograph on a bill is purely ceremonial (bills that pass become law with or without his signature), the governor does have the discretion to veto bills or portions of them. He raised more than a few eyebrows this week when **he vetoed the portion of the transportation budget that partially funded the controversial Columbia**

River Crossing project that would replace the Interstate 5 bridge between Vancouver and Portland. That could have an onerous impact on our family budgets, and here's why...

As you may know, the Columbia River Crossing is a proposed "mega-project" to replace the I-5 bridge and extend Portland's financially-troubled light rail system into Clark County...something Clark County voters have rejected on multiple occasions. If built as envisioned, the project's price tag would total **an estimated \$3.5 billion**, with Washington and Oregon paying a portion and the federal government (and toll payers) covering the rest.



The governor has repeatedly stated his support for the \$3.5 billion light-rail bridge project as designed, but on Tuesday he vetoed the only appropriation for the CRC in the transportation budget: \$81 million to pay for a redesign in the event that the U.S. Coast Guard won't permit the project because of its effects on river navigation. Essentially what he did was eliminate any chance of postponing the project until all sides could reach an agreement, and limiting the state's choices to either **abandoning the project altogether** or **passing a huge transportation revenue package** that would increase your price at the pump by 10 cents per gallon! Obviously, I'm opposing this proposed gas tax hike and will keep you posted on its status as we near the end of the special session.

I am not opposed to making sure that our state's bridges are safe, but what we need to do is look at where and how our resources are being used. I was deeply concerned when I learned in the Senate Transportation Committee about the potential inconsistencies in CRC expense reporting. The SR-520 bridge pontoons that didn't float were also particularly disconcerting. Those faulty pontoons are going to cost tax payers close to \$100 million to fix. **We need to hold people accountable for their actions and make sure that we are good stewards of taxpayer money.**

Bills to streamline businesses, create jobs become law



Also last week, the governor signed another business-reform bill that furthers the goal of regulatory reform in Washington. [House Bill 1818](#) - the "companion" bill (identical measure introduced in the opposite chamber) to my [Senate Bill 5765](#) - creates a pilot-scale program to be administered by the Department of Commerce with the goal of improving the regulatory environment for businesses in Washington. Together with the Office of Regulatory Assistance and the Office of Accountability and Performance, the commerce department must conduct **multi-jurisdictional regulatory-streamlining projects** that impact specific industry sectors, beginning with the state's manufacturing sector.

Additionally, [House Bill 1403](#) - the companion to my [Senate Bill 5680](#) - became law earlier this month. It will promote economic development by **reforming the Business Licensing Service**

that is the state's primary business-licensing portal. BLS registers businesses, renews licenses and provides related services for approximately 40,000 businesses monthly, and has more than 115 state licenses available through its website. The measure removes two agencies and adds 16 to the list required to provide all their licenses online through the BLS website. Each agency would also provide an annual report to the state Department of Revenue.

Taken together, these new laws help streamline state government and improve its ability to serve businesses. **There are several more business-efficiency bills I've sponsored that are being considered as part of the budget-negotiations**, and while they all passed the Senate unanimously during the regular session, it remains to be seen if the House of Representatives wants to make it easier for businesses to create private-sector jobs and get people back to work.

The ongoing fight against human trafficking

Curbing the scourge of human trafficking has been among the Legislature's major priorities in recent years. This important work continued in the 2013 session with the passage of several bills, including **a comprehensive anti-trafficking bill** introduced by Republican Sen. Mike Padden of Spokane Valley.

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives unanimously approved [Senate Bill 5669](#). The bill makes changes to state anti-trafficking laws, including expanding the definition of "communication with a minor for immoral purposes" to cover the purchase or sale of commercial sex acts and sex trafficking; adding to the definition of first- and second-degree trafficking; and **making the penalties for those who patronize child prostitutes stronger**.



SB 5669 was one of several bills legislators approved this year concerning human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. [Senate Bill 5488](#) adds to the penalties for someone convicted of using online advertising in connection with the crime of commercial sexual abuse of a minor, and [Senate Bill 5308](#) creates a statewide committee that will recommend strategies for combatting the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Remembering Senator Mike Carrell

I was deeply saddened to learn of Senator Mike Carrell's death this morning. Though I only knew him a short time, **I considered him a great mentor and he will be greatly missed**. Senator Carrell spent 19 years serving the people of Lakewood, Tacoma, University Place, DuPont, Steilacoom, and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and I am privileged to have been able to work beside such a collegial statesman, however briefly.



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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon R. Brown".

Sharon Brown
State Senator
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