

SENATOR JIM HONEYFORD



15th District Olympia Report



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Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development - Ranking; Ways & Means - Capital Budget; Energy, Environment & Telecommunications



Legislature wraps up on time, doesn't raise taxes

For the first time since 2008, the Legislature finished the “short” legislative session in the 60 days allowed by the state’s constitution without calling for a costly special session. We also maintained a balanced budget for the second year in a row—without raising taxes.

When my colleagues and I formed the [Majority Coalition Caucus](#) last year, the Democrats who became the Senate minority were certain that we would radically change things; that the system they had spent years creating under their control would be discarded. I’m pleased to report that they were right: the MCC has legislated differently, not just in words, but through real action.

The Legislature is required to pass a new state operating budget in odd-numbered years. Supplemental budgets may be passed in even-numbered years but are not mandatory; they are meant to deal with emergency situations and tweak the course set by the new operating budget

the previous year. It was refreshing to see a supplemental budget that stuck to the basics and only funded key areas in need.

Continue reading for the highlights of the 2014 session.

College-tuition freeze and greater access to higher education

Good news for college students and parents trying to budget for college: For the second year in a row, the Legislature halted tuition increases at state colleges. The House Democrats initially rejected this proposal, but my caucus fought hard to protect this cost-saving approach for families. Although the cost of higher education is still too high, this freeze in tuition gives students and parents some breathing room as they plan for college.

We also made higher education less costly and more attainable for those who have served our country. Previously there was a one-year waiting period to pay in-state tuition rates for veterans attending Washington colleges. Not only did we remove that barrier, but we also made it possible for military training to count as academic credit. That way, degrees may be earned faster.

Taking care of the most vulnerable

My colleagues and I want to make sure our developmentally disabled citizens are protected and have meaningful work. That's why we passed the Vulnerable Individuals Priority Act to do just that. This act eliminates the state waitlist, making services for developmentally disabled citizens more accessible. More than 5,000 individuals will benefit with supported employment and caregiver respite.

Bills signed into law

Protecting Washington waterways from invasive species is critical. That's why I sponsored [Senate Bill 6040](#) and was pleased when it moved through both chambers and to the governor's desk. This is an important step in preventing infestations of our water infrastructure; unfortunately the House stripped out the funding that had been authorized by the Senate, meaning grants won't be available until at least next year.

[Senate Bill 6054](#) passed overwhelmingly in the House and Senate and was recently signed by the governor. This important aeronautic-safety legislation requires that certain towers more than 25 feet high be marked so that they are visible to airplanes during daylight hours.

Capital-budget outlook for 2014

As the head of the Senate Capital Budget I worked hard to negotiate a responsible budget this session. I was adamant any budget passed would protect taxpayers and not increase the state's credit-card debt for pet projects or green-light expensive state buildings that no one can afford to lease. In the end my colleagues and I were unable to reach an agreement with the House



Democrats. For them, more than \$19 million in pork spending and a new building at the Capitol was more important than funding true emergencies and vital projects. While this outcome is disappointing, it highlights the fundamental difference between the MCC and the Democratic majority in the House. Each year the state pays out roughly \$1 billion on its debt service. This is a billion dollars that could go to support education. For all the talk of funding education and meeting the *McCleary* decision, the House majority is all too eager to stiff taxpayers with unaffordable state buildings sought by special-interest groups.

You can be sure that I will continue to demand the same accountability when the Legislature convenes in January 2015.

In closing...

After so many special sessions over the past four years, I'm excited to be back home to enjoy springtime in Sunnyside.

Your feedback is how I serve you better as your state Senator. I answer my [email](#) personally. You may also call my office at (360) 786-7684 to voice your opinion or make an appointment.

It remains my honor to serve you in the Washington State Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jim'.

Jim Honeyford
State Senator, 15th District
