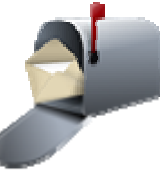




Senator Margarita Prentice

11th Legislative District



March 20, 2009

Dear Friends,

The following newsletter is another update of what the Legislature has been working on this past week. As always, you are welcome to contact me on these or other issues of interest.

I appreciate all of emails, phone calls and letters - your comments and concerns are important to me and are essential to my representing our district.

Sincerely,

In this Issue:

- State deficit
- Transportation budget
- Bills passed by the Senate

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STATE BUDGET SITUATION

State deficit now \$9 billion

The state's Revenue Forecast Council released a [new projection](#) of tax collections this week that has pushed our state's budget shortfall to \$9 billion. With the national economy continuing to sour, the Council projects tax collections will drop by \$552 million over the next 28 months. Weak housing and auto sales have spread to other segments of our economy such as manufacturing, aerospace, software publishing, and retail sales.

The revenue forecast is the last major piece to the budget puzzle that legislators need before releasing their own budget proposals. Unfortunately, these new numbers mean virtually every functional area of the budget that can legally be cut will be. That includes major cuts in education, health care, and services for the vulnerable.

To watch my comments on the current forecast, click [here](#).

Transportation

Next week, the Senate will unveil a transportation budget (which is separate pot of money than the overall operating budget) that focuses on enhancing the safety and efficiency of our state highway system and improves accountability within the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Washington State Ferries (WSF).

Our state is already on track to begin \$4.1 billion in highway construction and preservation projects during the next two years and the Senate is committed to using dedicated revenue sources like gas taxes and federal funds to continue improving our transportation system.

For a complete list of state highway transportation projects, click [here](#).

BILLS PASSED BY THE SENATE

Homebuyer bill of rights



[Senate Bill 5895](#) provides [homeowners with new protections from shoddy construction](#). The bill creates a four-year implied warranty for new homes and extensive remodels to ensure quality materials are being used, sound engineering and construction standards are being followed, third-party inspections are taken place, and construction workers must be certified by the state Department of Labor and Industries. To help limit litigation, homeowners and contractors must take their dispute to a state mediator before taking legal action.

SB 5895 has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

Foreclosure assistance

With our state seeing an [increase in foreclosures](#), [Senate Bill 5810](#) adds an arbitration step to the foreclosure process to allow the homeowner and lender to review potential options to avoid

foreclosure altogether. The current process of foreclosure is 6 months long with numerous steps. This bill also adds new protections for renters whose owners face foreclosure by increasing the notice to vacate from 20 days to 60.

SB 5810 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Judiciary Committee March 23rd at 1:30pm.

Reverse mortgages

[Senate Bill 5400](#) places new regulations on reverse mortgages to stop predatory lenders taking advantage of seniors. It requires approval from the Department of Financial Institutions before lenders can offer reverse mortgage loans and requires lenders to demonstrate financial stability by maintaining reserves or strong credit.

SB 5400 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Financial Institutions & Insurance Committee on March 24th at 1:30pm.

Cap and trade

The Governor's request bill, [Senate Bill 5735](#), would have adopted a cap and trade strategy for reducing green house gas emissions. As revised in the Senate, [it now has no trading and no capping](#) and instead directs the state Department of Ecology to provide a recommendation for what a reductions program using caps statewide and sector by sector would look like. This report is due back to the Legislature by 2011.

SB 5735 received a public hearing in the House Ecology & Parks Committee on March 17th.

Health care reform

[Senate Bill 5945](#) aims to drive down health care costs and guarantee that every Washington resident has access to quality health care. This [phase-in approach](#) includes extending coverage to individuals below 200 percent of the federal poverty level in an Apple Health program for adults; consolidating purchasing of health coverage and streamlining administration; and examining the health reform proposals and selecting one, or a combination, for consideration.

SB 5945 received a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 20th.

Prescription drug costs

[Senate Bill 5892](#) allows the state options to save money on Medicaid prescriptions and direct appropriate drug use – just like the private sector insurance plans have used for years. The state could save as much as \$40 million over the next two years.

SB 5892 has been referred to the House Ways & Means Committee.

Health information security

[Senate Bill 5501](#) develops guidelines and standards to improve patient access to and control of their own health care information. It also calls for the implementation of methods for the secure exchange of clinical data.

SB 5501 received a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 19th.

MRSA infections

[Senate Bill 5500](#) requires hospitals to adopt standard procedures for testing patients admitted to ICU or surgery for [MRSA](#). The legislation also requires that MRSA-related deaths be clearly noted on death certificates.

SB 5500 has been referred to the House Health Care & Wellness Committee.

Community health grants

[Senate Bill 5360](#) establishes Community Health Care Collaborative Grant program to further help community-based coalitions increase health care access for employed, low income persons and children in school who are uninsured and underinsured.

SB 5360 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 24th.



Primary care doctors

[Senate Bill 5502](#) addresses the growing shortage of primary care physicians

by establishing a tuition waiver for a limited number of primary care students. The program will be paid for by cost shifting to students who are studying to become specialists.

SB 5502 received a public hearing in the House Higher Education Committee on March 20th.

Personal hygiene products

[Senate Bill 6053](#) creates a pilot project within the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to provide personal hygiene products and basic cleaning supplies to needy families.

SB 6053 received a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 20th.

Medicare waiting period

[Senate Bill 8013](#) is a Senate Joint Memorial requesting that the President and members of congress eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare enrollment for those individuals with an approved social security disability.

SJM 8013 received a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 20th.

Organ transplants

[Senate Bill 5725](#) increases the minimum insurance coverage for transplants from \$250,000 to \$350,000.

SB 5725 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 24th.

Medicaid policy disclosure

[Senate Bill 6009](#) requires assisted living facilities to disclose its Medicaid policies to anyone who is considering moving in. Many elderly residents of these facilities have been “evicted” after spending tens of thousands of dollars at the facility, and “spending down” to a level that qualifies them for Medicaid.

SB 6009 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Health Care & Wellness Committee on March 24th.

Child welfare services reform

[Senate Bill 5943](#) allows the state Department of Social and Health Services to move nearly all of its family reconciliation and preservation, adoption, foster care, and many other services into Performance Based Contracts, potentially with private non-profit agencies. The goal is to increase efficiencies and offer incentives for success while keeping the focus on the safety and well-being of our children.

SB 5943 has been scheduled for a public hearing in the House Early Learning & Children’s Services Committee on March 24th.

To contact me toll-free, call the Legislative Hotline at [1-800-562-6000](tel:1-800-562-6000).

To send any comments or to unsubscribe from this newsletter, visit: <http://www.sdc.wa.gov/senators/prentice/>.