



Legislative UPDATE

A weekly report from the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO



FEB. 05, 2008

Vol. XXIII, No. 3

Bill Cut-off looms in Short Session

This year's short session is speeding ahead. The clock is ticking and any policy bills that are still in committee by the February 8th cut-off date are dead. Fiscal committee cut-off is February 12th.

As always your participation matters. When legislators hear from constituents, the volume of the corporate lobbyists' voices can be lowered and things can begin to happen that will benefit working families.

Speak out on the issues you read about here. Call, email or write your legislators and let them know you are reading, tell them about the bills you are watching and remind them that you are deciding how you will cast your own vote in the future. Remember, democracy depends on individual participation... your voice can make a difference.

Academics Need a Full Time Commitment

For decades the Community and Technical College system has marginalized its faculty workforce by increasing the number of part-time faculty to full-time faculty positions. This is a national problem as well as a state problem. We are now at the point where the majority of our faculty in the system are part-time instructors. The ratio of full-time instructors to part-time instructors, is approximately 1/3 to 2/3, with part-time instructors teaching approximately one-half of all classes taught in the system.

The dedication of these instructors ensures that class room instruction doesn't suffer; but student services and student achievement does suffer. When a faculty member is part-time he or she can't dedicate time to office hours, counseling, curriculum planning – services that are essential for students to succeed. What was once seen as a system-wide cost saving measure put in place when state budgets became tight is now becoming a liability to the entire system. We cannot reach the state's overall goal of increasing student achievement and improving the system with a majority of part-time faculty members.

In a 1999 budget proviso the legislature commissioned a full-time/part-time faculty mix study. The results concluded that a serious faculty mix problem existed and that, funding available, 361 full-time faculty positions should be added to the system which would bring the ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty to a 2/3 to 1/3 mix – the opposite of what exists today.

This finding was repeated during a 2005 Best Employment Practices Taskforce report by the State Board for Community &

If you would like to receive this newsletter via e-mail or want more information about WSLC positions on legislative issues, visit

www.wslc.org

Technical Colleges. Resolution #3 called for addressing the faculty mix issue through appropriate legislative funding and resolution #5 called for a level of job security for part-time faculty.

HB 2528 and SB 6369 address these issues by stopping the erosion of full-time faculty and putting basic job security protections in place to help part-time faculty members. HB 2528 and SB 6369 are worthy of your support.

Prescriptions Should be a Private Matter

The question is: Should drug sales representatives be allowed to walk into a doctor's office and say; "We have the records of all the drugs you currently prescribe your patients and instead of using those drugs you should prescribe the drugs we make"...?

That is what the Prescription Privacy bill (HB 2664) is all about. It would ban pharmaceutical companies from buying lists of doctors' prescribing records and using them for marketing purposes. The bill would still allow prescribing records to be used for research and recall purposes.

Doctors are unaware when a company has purchased their records and they are overwhelmingly against the practice. We believe that doctors have a right to privacy in what they prescribe.

HB 2664 is on the House floor calendar and is poised for a vote. But big PhRMA, pharmaceutical companies and biotech companies are strongly opposed to this legislation. The army of pharmaceutical lobbyists is out to kill this bill and only constituent action will solidify the need for this legislation in the minds of our representatives. We urge you to send emails or call your representatives and tell them to vote to stop drug companies from using our doctors' prescribing records to market their drugs. Tell them to support HB 2664.

Also on the health care agenda...

The Healthy Washington Coalition is testifying this week on HB 2536 which creates the Working Group to envision the future

(CONTINUED ON BACK)

of health care in WA State.

We are also awaiting action in the Senate on the Working Group (SB 6333) and Prescription Privacy (SB 6241). Also, The Insurance Rate Accountability bill (SB 5261) passed in the Senate last week by a vote of 31 to 18. This bill will give the Insurance Commissioner the ability to review any rate increases proposed by health insurance companies. The companion bill (HB 1234) is up for a hearing in the house Tuesday at 6 p.m. Stay tuned...

Getting Benefits during the Appeals Process

If a worker gets injured on the job or develops a disease related to a job they apply for Industrial Insurance benefits through Labor and Industries or through their employer if they are self insured. If the request is granted benefits are paid right away. Too often though, a self-insured employer will withhold benefits, the department will reverse the decision of the self insured employer and the self insured employer then appeals the decision to the Board of Industrial Insurance. When the employer appeals the department's decision, the workers benefits stop until the appeal is determined. Unfortunately mortgage payments, food and utility bills, and car payments don't stop – injured workers still have to pay these when the employer appeals their workers' compensation claim.

HB 3139 and SB 6750 (Benefits on Appeal) will ensure that, if there is an appeal, the benefits already granted to the worker will not stop while the claim is under review.

Built into the bill is an expedited review process at the Board (40 days) which allows the employer to make their case that a claim is really not valid and, if they prevail, then benefits will stop. This lowers liability for both the employer as well as the worker.

Help for New Americans

The Washington New Americans Initiative is an attempt to reach out to the 135,000 immigrants in our state who are eligible to become naturalized citizens but who have yet to start the process. It is a chance to coordinate policies on the way we integrate immigrants into our communities, how we help them build stronger lives and increase their contributions to the state's economy.

The initiative will establish a Statewide Policy Council to develop strategies on how to help the immigrant community follow their pathway to citizenship, develop their English acquisition skills, familiarize themselves with educational opportunities and will examine the development of the immigrant workforce.

In 2005, foreign-born residents made up about 12% of Washington's total population; we have the 10th largest foreign-born population in the country. The Governor has expressed her commitment to signing an executive order and the WSLC is in strong support of the effort.

How the University Works

A landmark bill was passed during the 2002 legislative session that enabled bargaining to go forward between teaching assistants and research assistants at the University of Washington and the United Auto Workers Union. Five years later, four thousand student workers are a part of the union and two successful contracts

have been negotiated and signed without a hitch.

This year HB 2963 and SB 6737 would extend the authority to bargain to research assistants and teaching assistants at Washington State University.

The truth is student workers make the Universities function. They teach more than half of the undergraduate instructional hours; they do the ground-work for the \$200 million in federal and private research grants that WSU gets each year; and they grade the tests and papers, run the student discussion groups and hold office hours.

WSU is the last remaining research university on the West Coast that doesn't bargain with its academic student employees.

It is time to extend collective bargaining rights to these student employees, many of whom are struggling to raise families on low wages with no benefits. They deserve the protections a union contract can offer especially in terms of affordable health care, a fair wage and a say in their working conditions

Washington Needs High-Speed Internet Access

In the 21st century, access to high speed internet isn't a luxury, it's a necessity. Ensuring that all Washingtonians have access to affordable high speed internet is an investment in our future. A true high-speed Internet system across Washington will:

- Fuel the state's economy, create jobs and keep us competitive
- Bridge the digital divide and create opportunity in rural and underserved communities
- Improve the health, safety and educational opportunities for all Washington residents.

In order to ensure that Washington does not fall behind, we need a systematic and comprehensive broadband policy. Go to www.speedmatterswa.org and see how you can help get this legislation enacted. (HB 2559/SB 6348).

Some hearings this week

TUESDAY, Feb. 5 @ 5:30 p.m. Senate Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research & Development hearing on defining the term "employ" for minimum wage purposes. (SB 6867) in SHR4 also @ 6:00 p.m. House Health Care & Wellness hearing on the Insurance Rate Accountability bill (HB 1234) in HHR A.

WSLC Legislative Conference will be Feb. 14

Leaders, staffers and rank-and-file members of WSLC-affiliated unions are invited to get a progress report on labor's legislative agenda at the Washington State Labor Council's 2008 Legislative Conference, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 14 at the Olympia Red Lion Hotel. As always, there will be a reception from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. the preceding evening on Wednesday, Feb. 13 at the hotel with many legislators and other state officials in attendance. The conference registration fee, which includes materials, lunch and one admission to the reception, is \$50. Get more information, including registration forms, at www.wslc.org.