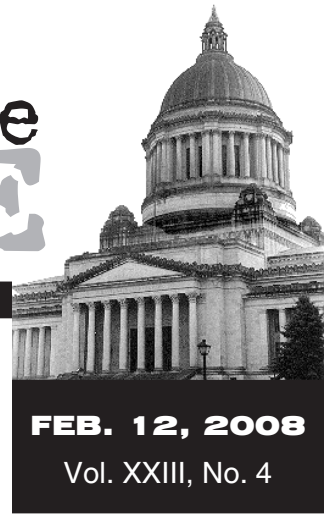




Legislative UPDATE

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



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Peeking Behind the Curtain A Look at Legislation Affecting Working Families

Unintended Consequences

Unemployment Insurance legislation passed in 2003 now presents a roadblock for apprentices who apply for UI benefits when they enter a Commissioner Approved Training program (CAT). Two companion bills have been introduced to fix the unintended consequences – HB 2967 and SB 6751.

Prior to the 2003 legislation the Commissioner of ESD and his/her designees had broad discretion to make decisions around UI benefits and voluntary quits. Historically, if the apprentice candidate was not already working in the field, but was working in a different type of employment they would give their employer notice that they were leaving work to enter an apprenticeship program. They would then go to the old job service center and file for UI benefits. The benefits were approved case by case based on the history whether the worker met all the requirements to receive unemployment insurance benefits and whether the training was CAT. The net effect was that our apprentices received their UI benefits while in training without there being a disqualifying voluntary quit decision

After the 2003 legislation was passed, and in particular, January 4, 2004 our apprentices more likely than not got tagged with a disqualifying voluntary quit when they left their previous job. Historical precedent was not longer considered. About 75 appren-



tices a year get caught under the new law and are disqualified from receiving benefits even though they have the qualifying hours and are participating in training that is otherwise considered CAT.

It is time to fix this unintended consequence of the 2003 law change. We want to be encouraging young people and people of color to be joining our apprenticeship programs not putting up roadblocks in their way. Please support HB 2967 and SB 6751.

Upcoming Dates to Remember

TUESDAY, Feb 12 - Fiscal Cut Off - Bills not out of House Approps or Senate Ways & Means are dead.

FEBRUARY 13-19 floor action - lots of lobbying to get our bills to the floor & passed-Policy&Fiscal bills alive.

TUESDAY, Feb 19 5:00 - House of Origin Bill Cut Off - Bills not passed by their Houses of Origin are dead.

WEDNESDAY, Feb 20 - Begining 2nd round - Opposite house policy committees consider bills pulled from other house

FRIDAY, Feb 29 - Cut off for bills in policy committees

MONDAY, March 3 - Cut off for fiscal/policy bills out of House Approps/Senate Ways & Means

Highjacking Doctors' Prescription Pads

Goliath is swinging heavy punches toward David in the fight to create comprehensive, affordable health care for all Washingtonians. This week's battle is over HB 2664 & SB 6241, the Prescription Privacy legislation.

The Healthy WA Coalition (David in metaphorical terms) is fighting to protect the privacy and trust of the doctor/patient relationship. They are advocating for both health care providers and patients who overwhelmingly want to stop the pharmaceutical companies from using data mining – that is the practice of purchasing doctors' prescribing records and using that information to

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market more expensive (ie: non generic) drugs. It is disturbing to think that big drug companies can manipulate the doctors through such intimate information.

Goliath, or Big PhRMA and their allies, wants to keep making profits from their marketing strategies. The data mining companies want to keep making their money from selling the prescribing records. The American Medical Association wants to keep making their \$20 million a year from selling the names of prescribing providers despite the fact that the vast majority of doctors in WA are not members nor supporters of the A.M.A.

So the battle is on: on one side is the right to privacy, the integrity of the patient/doctor relationship, and the efforts to drive down the costs of prescription drugs. The other side is the desperate attempt by drug companies to keep their profits by purchasing the prescribing records of doctors. Stay tuned to see which side the legislature is on.

More Health Care Legislation

Insurance Rate Accountability bill: SB 5261, which will restore the regulatory authority on the Office of the Insurance Commissioner, is heading to the floor of the House for a vote. When this bill passes, the incredible increases in premiums by the health care insurance carriers will once again be regulated ensuring any increases reflect actual costs and not the desire to maximize profits. This bill, which received the active lobbying support of the Healthy Washington Coalition, has a decent chance of passing out of the House next week and getting to the Governor's desk well before the end of the session.

Envisioning the Future of Health Care in Washington: HB 2536 & SB 6333, create a Citizens Working Group to analyze various health care reform proposals and to initiate a robust discussion with all Washingtonians about the need for quality affordable health care for all Washingtonians. They have been voted out of their respective policy committees and are now to be considered by fiscal committees. This legislation will create the foundation for a future proposal, hopefully in the 2009 legislative session, that will provide quality affordable health care for all. Stay tuned...this is a biggie!!!

Injured Worker Benefits

Benefits on Appeal: HB 3139 & SB 6750 provide injured workers their time loss and medical benefits when an employer appeals a decision favorable to workers to the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals. We have been trying to achieve this fundamental fairness for injured workers since 1989. This year, the bills have received favorable votes from the policy committees and are moving through the process. Stay tuned...we may need all of you to weigh in with your legislators on this important workers comp. legislation.

"Specialized Foster Parents" Deserve Rights

In 2006, state foster parents affiliated with Washington Federation of State Employees /AFSCME. In 2007, a task force proposed that foster parents, who care for children needing a higher level of attention, specifically medically fragile and behaviorally challenged children, needed a special classification of their own.

Now WFSE /AFSCME Council 28 is urging passage of legislation extending collective bargaining rights to this new class of specialized foster parents. The bill, SHB 3145, would affect about 2,000 foster parents and needs to clear the House Appropriations Committee by Feb. 12. We support their efforts.

Whistleblower Protection

The Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME Council 28 has initiated legislation to expand the ability of state employees to report management impropriety through the state Whistleblower Program.

SSB 6776 and HB 3193 would also protect state employees from retaliation for expressing scientific opinions that may differ from the official opinion of their agency. This provision applies generally to three state agencies whose mission is based on science: Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources.

The State Employee Scientific Integrity/Whistleblower Bill is supported by state Auditor's Office and the Government Accountability Project.

SSB 6776 is now in the Senate Ways and Means Committee; it needs to clear that panel by Feb. 12. HB 3193 is in the House Rules Committee; it must be scheduled for a House vote and pass by Feb. 19.

WSLC Legislative Conference will be Feb. 14 At the Red Lion Olympia Hotel

Here's some agenda highlights:

8:45 a.m.	Representative Eileen Cody
9:00 a.m.	Sen. Lisa Brown, Sen. Majority Leader
9:15 a.m.	Representative Steve Conway
9:30 a.m.	Rick Bender, President
9:45 a.m.	Eleni Papadakis, Director, WT&ECB
10:00 a.m.	Judy Schurke, Director, L & I
10:15 a.m.	WSLC Lobbyist Presentation
10:45 a.m.	Rep. Frank Chopp, Spkr. of the House
11:00 a.m.	Karen Lee, Commissioner, ES
11:15 a.m.	Senator Karen Keiser
11:30 a.m.	WSLC Lobbyist Presentations
12:00 p.m.	Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles

Don't forget our Legislative Reception on Tuesday, February 13 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m also at the Red Lion. Stop by. As always, there will be many legislators and other state officials in attendance.