



# Legislative UPDATE

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



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## No Room for Budgetary Pessimism

The budget forecast comes out today and the naysayers are having a field day. We think the pessimists should reconsider. Whatever the numbers are, the fact is that our economy in Washington State is stronger than any other state in the nation.

We are strong in transportation, in construction and in aerospace. What ever downturn we see is sure to be short lived. Pessimism will get us nowhere ... we must continue to build on the rights of workers and busy ourselves with the creation of good family wage jobs for our state.

As we look to the future with confidence we would do well to remember Franklin DR's words: *"Not only our future economic soundness but the very soundness of our democratic institutions depends on the determination of our government to give employment to idle men."*

### Drug Lobbyists Numb Legislators' Minds

Consumers, providers and health care advocates are pleading with the Legislature to pass the Prescription Privacy bill (SB 6241 & HB 2664) but, as the chorus gets louder and louder, the pharmaceutical lobbyists are tightening their grip on the arms of the legislators.

Democrats normally in tune with consumer advocates and constituents are, for some reason, refusing to step up to the plate and protect the privacy of the doctor/patient relationship.

WSLC lobbyist Robby Stern said, "We know who is supporting this bill and who is opposing the bill. We are asking the elected officials who oppose the bill to put aside the reasons they have been fed by those who profit from this invasive practice. We urge them to recognize that the patients, the citizens of this state, want them to exercise control over this pharmaceutical marketing ploy that invades our privacy, forces up the cost of prescription drugs and endangers consumers."

If the legislature fails to act the biggest loser is the credibility of the legislature itself; but the people of this state also lose because they will continue to be exploited by the marketing practices of the pharmaceutical industry.

### We Need Industry Standards for HVAC Techs

HVAC/R technicians work with dangerous substances like



President Rick Bender introduces Gov. Christine Gregoire at the WSLC's 2008 Legislative Conference this week. For a full story and more pictures visit [www.wslc.org](http://www.wslc.org)

natural gas and refrigerants every day From 1999 through 2003, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that 65,900 structural fires and 370 structural fire deaths were directly related to gas heaters, chimneys, central air, and air conditioners. Without appropriate certification, the public simply cannot have any confidence that the person performing their service is qualified to industry standards.

The HVAC bill (HB 1876 and SB 5831) ensures that consumers receive the highest quality service from professionals trained to do the job in the safest manner possible. It is time for Washington State to join 36 other states by enacting a uniform HVAC/R certification.

### Ground Floor Representation

Labor activists are ready to send the Forest Practices Board to the woodshed over the fact that the Board, which has been in existence since 1974, has never included a member of labor. Every other constituency in the industry is represented but the workers' voice is silent.

The Board sets standards for forest practices including timber harvest, logging road construction and chemical applications to the forests. The 12 member board includes an independent log-

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ging contractor and five members of the general public. HB 2893 will provide a workers' voice and give the Board some perspective from the ground up.

A forest worker's job is fraught with danger; the workers on the ground need representation on this Board to ensure both safety and working conditions are always considered as practices are established.

## Jobs for Community and Technical Colleges

As many as 350 full-time academic positions would be added at community and technical colleges over the next five years if SHB 2528 is funded. These positions would be subject to collective bargaining so that part-time instructors would have a good chance of filling the new positions. The bill was referred to Appropriations this week.

Part-time instructors make up about 70% of the teaching force in our two-year higher ed institutions. The legislation also calls for job security for part-time faculty, who often teach quarter-to-quarter and campus-to-campus never knowing whether or not they will be assigned a class next quarter or be available for student advising.

This bill was introduced by AFT Washington as part of a nationwide campaign sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers, to remedy the academic staffing crisis in our public colleges and bring a better balance between full-time instructors and part-time instructors.

## Accountability Belongs to Elected Officials

The Insurance Rate Accountability bill (FB 5261), which we had been told would pass two days ago, continues to languish in the House. It appears to be hung up as a result of a Democratic amendment that would, in effect, limit the power of the Insurance Commissioner to protect the health care of consumers of the state.

The amendment would place in the hands of a non-elected administrative law judge the ability to make a final decision on the rate, rather than leaving the final decision in the hands of the Office of the Insurance Commissioner. Any OIC decision may be appealed to Superior Court.

The Insurance Commissioner is elected by the people, is accountable to the people and is expected to serve as a watchdog of the insurance industry. We hope this amendment will be dropped so that the Insurance Rate Accountability bill will be passed by the Legislature and move on to the Governor's desk.

## The Future of WA Depends on Clean Energy and Green Jobs

Last year, lawmakers passed a bill setting goals for reducing emissions over the next four decades and increasing clean-energy

jobs to 25,000 by 2020. This year, HB 2815, the Clean Energy and Green Jobs bill, builds off that underlying law and sets the guidelines for how to reach the state's goals.

The measure, which was requested by Gov. Gregoire, funds labor market research, industry skills panels, and creates the Green Collar Jobs Training Account to administer grants to training providers, including apprenticeship programs. It is the first-ever state-wide measure in the U.S. to tie green-collar jobs to measurement and reporting of major sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and also to the design of a regional carbon market.

The House Bill has passed the Ecology and Parks Committee and the Appropriations Committee. A House floor vote is expected sometime before Tuesday. There have been several versions of the bill already and we are expecting a new version before the floor vote.

The key elements of the bill are all still in place, but special interests are lobbying hard to weaken the commitment to achieving the pollution reductions, and to carve out special deals for some industries. The immediate challenge is to hold off weakening amendments and bolster legislators' support for a strong bill.

Strong action on climate change is what is going to drive green job growth. The Legislature should fully fund the Climate Action and Green Jobs bill. It's only a matter of time before carbon emission reductions become Federal policy. This is Washington's chance to get in on the ground floor so we can develop clean, green jobs and continue Washington's leading-edge economic advantage.

## Better Day Care through Organizing

Child care centers are organizing to improve the quality of care for Washington's children. Like family child care providers two years ago, child care center teachers and directors are working to pass HB 2449 and its companion SB 6522. The bill would create a statewide organization to negotiate with the state around higher reimbursement rates, professional development, and employee benefits. The outcome would be to increase teacher retention and training and to improve parents' access to high-quality child care.

Multinational corporate chains like Kindercare, LaPetite Academy, and the YMCA are mounting opposition and are trying to stop small independent centers from having a voice. The bill has moved through all necessary committees and now is ready for a floor vote.

Child care workers and directors need a united voice to advocate for higher standards, better training for teachers, and greater access to quality care for working families. Family child care providers were able to make important gains for the kids in their care by forming their union, and center teachers want to bring those same improvements to all kids in child care.

## WC Benefits on Appeal Ready for Action

We look forward to the passage of the Benefits on Appeal bill HB 3139 or its companion SB 6750. They both are ready for floor action. The bill has been perfected, needs no further amendments and is ready to go. Hope for the best.