



WSLC

Legislative Update

January 9, 2009

Vol. XXIV — No. 1

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



It's not ALL about the Benjamins

Budget aside, state legislators still have opportunities to help struggling families

No money, mo' problems.

That's what most—if not all—news coverage of the 2009 legislative session that begins Monday has focused on: the projected \$5.7 billion (and growing) revenue shortfall, Gov. Chris Gregoire's all-cuts budget proposal, and the looming painful decisions state legislators will make about what Washington state can afford. And what it can't.

There's no question fiscal matters will dominate the session. But no one should pretend that there's little else for legislators to do during these troubled economic times other than deliberating the official state candy.

The Washington State Labor Council and its affiliated unions will be pursuing a legislative agenda that certainly includes budget issues and efforts to mitigate the harm done to our valued state employees, our health care system, and the state's most vulnerable citizens. But we will also pursue other important measures intended to help Washington's working families weather this national economic storm. Some deal with ensuring the state's planned economic stimulus package targets the recession's real victims: people who've lost their jobs through no fault of their own and who'll pump their unemployment benefits immediately into community economies. Others aim to protect basic rights in the workplace.

What the items of the WSLC's 2009 legislative agenda all have in common though is that all aim to directly help working families, as opposed to corporate special interests. Given that government deregulation and unchecked corporate greed are what caused this recession, it's time that all elected officials heed the clear message of the 2008 elections: Abandon the trickle-down economics and wage-suppressing policies pushed by business lobbyists. and put people first. That's the change we can believe in!

Here is a brief outline of the WSLC's 2009 legislative agenda. These bulleted points are short on detail in this first *Legislative Update*, but rest assured, you'll be hearing a lot more from us about each of them in the coming weeks.



Worker Privacy Act

- Ensure workers maintain their First Amendment rights at the workplace on issues of individual conscience, such as religion, politics, charitable giving and union organizing.



Economic Stimulus

- Prime the economy with enhanced weekly unemployment checks. Add \$50 to every UI check for 2009, increase the benefit formula by .15 and allow spouses full range of "quit to follow" benefits.
- Appropriate dollars for Working Families Tax Rebate.
- Expedite readiness of capitol projects and invest in high-demand workforce training and apprenticeships.



Health Care

- Do no harm to existing health care initiatives.
- Act on results of SB 6333.
- Find long-term, stable funding for public health.



State Employee Contracts

- Recognize the value of our state employees by supporting their collective bargaining agreements.



Revenue Package

- Support a responsible revenue package to meet our state's needs.

In addition, every year the Washington State Labor Council supports a range of legislation developed in coordination with our affiliated unions and our community coalition partners. For the 2009 Legislative Session we will support bills in the following categories:



Collective Bargaining

- Enabling legislation for local bargaining for two-year

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college faculty.

- Enabling legislation for performing artists.
- Enabling legislation for early learning educators at early learning centers.

✓ Social Insurance

- Workers' Compensation: Limiting ex-parte communication with an injured worker's doctor when the claim is at the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals.
- Unemployment Insurance: Bring UI system into conformity by charging taxes on the same two-quarter basis as benefits. Secure administrative funding for ESD via federal fix or through an offset tax. Right size trust fund after recession is over.

✓ Labor Standards

- Fund Family Leave Insurance to cover babies, family members and the workers' own illness.
- HVAC licensing.
- FTEs to enforce the Wage Payment Act.
- Prevailing wages on public/private partnership projects.

✓ Health Care

- Close the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) loophole.
- Continue effort to "Cover All Children."
- Increase scholarship and loan repayment program for primary care.
- Maintain the Health Insurance Partnership Act.

✓ Education

- Add a labor member to the boards of trustees for the community colleges.
- Expand the TESC Labor Education and Research Center to Central Puget Sound Region.
- Faculty and College Excellence: conversions and job security.

✓ Housing and Consumer Protection

- WSLC Affordable Housing and Homelessness Task Force Agenda.
- Prevention of predatory lending.

United Labor Lobby meets Monday at 10 a.m.

The United Labor Lobby, a meeting of WSLC-affiliated union representatives and coalition partners, will hold its first meeting on the session's opening day, Monday, Jan. 12 at 10 a.m. at the WSLC's Olympia office. The regular time and day of the ULL's future weekly meetings will be determined later.

2009 Legislative Position Papers published

Every two years before the legislative biennium begins, the Washington State Labor Council publishes its Legislative Position Papers on specific issues. From minimum wage to workers' compensation, from overtime pay to unemployment insurance, these Position Papers include ibackground information, labor's position and recent legislative histories. They are available at the WSLC web site -- www.wslc.org -- under "Legislative Issues."

Scheduled next week...

Following are some of next week's events of interest:

MONDAY, Jan. 12—Noon, Opening Day ceremonies and swearing (in) begins.

TUESDAY, Jan. 13—10 a.m. in House Hearing Rm B, House Commerce & Labor holds a work session on L&I budget, fund balances and request legislation.
—1:30 p.m. in Senate Hearing Rm 4, Senate Labor, Commerce & Consumer Protection holds a work session that includes an ESD report on unemployment trends and the trust fund status.

WEDNESDAY, Jan. 14—At 11:30 a.m., Gov. Gregoire delivers her inaugural address in a joint session.

THURSDAY, Jan. 15—At 6 p.m. at the Olympia Center, 2nd & Columbia, the WSLC is hosting a Legislative Briefing. All state representatives and senators have been invited for hors d'oeuvres and to meet the Council's lobbying staff. Call Jan Hays at 206-281-8901 for more information.

FRIDAY, Jan. 16—At 8 a.m. in House Hearing Rm B, House Commerce & Labor holds a work session on ESD budget, fund balances and request legislation.

For more information, visit www.wslc.org or call Communications Director Kathy Cummings at (206) 281-8901.