What got done, what didn’t

By JEFF JOHNSON

While some good things came out of the 2015 session, huge opportunities to lessen inequality and to fix our structural budget/revenue deficit were dismissed and passed up by Sens. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville) and Andy Hill (R-Redmond) and their band of Tea Party Republicans.

The process was ugly and bizarre. After Governor Jay Inslee signed the operating budget on June 30, preventing a state shutdown, the House and Senate adjourned in the wee hours of July 1 with voting only partially complete on the transportation package and the capital budget. Last-minute bargaining detailed a Senate vote on suspending the I-1351 class-size initiative, which temporarily left a $2 billion hole in the just-signed operating budget.

Senate Majority Leader Schoesler decreed as “extortion” the Democrats’ refusal to vote on suspending I-1351 unless a student assessment bill—one that passed 92-6 in the House—was also brought up for a vote. He and the extreme right Republican Senate had just extorted the House and the governor...
What got done, what didn’t

Continued from Page 1

by forcing a poison pill into the transportation package that blocked the governor from doing anything administratively on clean fuel standards for years. It seems that one person’s extortion is another’s good policy. The legislation is garbage. We have now had 21 extra legislative sessions in this century, so far. Nearly a third of them (6) since the GOP took control of the Senate in 2013. Another three extra sessions happened when they controlled the Senate in 2001.

The Republican Senate, with Sens. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane) and John Braun (R-Centralia) in the lead, kept up a relentless attack on collective bargaining rights, injured worker benefits, and a refusal to deal with raising the minimum wage or paid safe and sick leave. Limiting collective bargaining rights (SB 6126) remained on the table until the last day of the second extra session.

The Republican Senate also refused to pass the Voting Rights Act to address discriminatory voting practices in cities and counties that have prevented candidates of color from being elected to public office.

Operating budget

At the end of the day some components of the operating budget went down. But how about raising wages so that more folks could actually afford college tuition? How about by “Great Recession” austerity, or the need to dramatically lower carbon emissions. This was pure extortion and the type of backward thinking we have come to expect from the Republican Party. Given the crisis of climate change, we need to work together with every tool possible to dramatically lower carbon emissions over the next several decades. The truth is that the gas and oil industry is going to have to pay their share of the costs of this pollution and its negative impacts on our health and communities.

Capital budget

The capital budget was also left partially undone on July 1 with the bonding bill still hanging out there. Some of the pieces that we have been tracking and that will achieve policy goals and create jobs are:

$75 million for farmlands housing.

$53 million for stormwater clean-up projects.

$33.6 million flood plain projects.

$40.4 million clean energy fund grants.

$22 million energy efficiency and solar grants for public buildings, and

$150,000.00 for Casa Latina (elevator).

The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

321 16th Ave., S., Seattle, WA 98114 (206-281-8901) – 906 S. Columbia St. SW, #330, Olympia, WA 98501 (360-493-0608)

President: Jeffery Johnson
Secretary-Treasurer: Lynne Dodson

Vice Presidents: David Madore, CWA
Carilo Barragan, PAW
Jackie Boschken, ARA
Todd Collier, SUP
Michael Darden, CIW
David Freiboth, IFPTE
Bob Hattingh, WSEA
Bob Hasegawa, APALA
Jon Hogdan, IAM
Judy Huntingdon, VSOMA
Rich Johnson, B&O
Vance Leih, AFT
Stefanie Lloyd-Agnew, CLW
Mark Lowry, ATU

Lee Malinda, PAW
Angela Marshall, YW
Herbie Martin, ATU
Dave Myers, IBEW
Toufic Yenni, IBEW
Jackie Rae, B&O
Marka Lichten, UMW
Patty Rose, B&O
Michael Stalcup, WSP
Karen Strickland, AFT
Steve Brady, CLW
Ted Thomas, CBU
Eric Trimb, UMW
Jim Tieszen, AFT
Shannon Walker, IAM

Administrative Staff:
Ellois Elofson ........................................... 2015 Legislative Intern
D. Nealon Groves ..................................... Communications Director
Carlyl Jekel ............................................... WLA Labor Liaison
Carrie Meyers ......................................... Government Affairs Director
Vonna Lettsch ............................................. Project HELP Director
Bill Messinger ........................................... WLA Labor Liaison
Teresa Mosqueda ......... Political & Strategic Campaign Director
Katie Lynch ............................................. K-12/Apprenticeship/College Director
Lori Province .......................................... Field Mobilization Director
Rebecca Vance .......... Accounting Manager

Support Staff:
Jessica Gallardo, Jamé Hays, Kamaria Hightower,
Robert New, Kathy Petruzzelli, Karen White, Justine Winnie

The WSLC Legislative Report is an annual publication of the

The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Accountability sought for tax breaks

When legislators rushed into special session in November 2013 to approve aerospace tax breaks, the tax breaks were worth $8.7 billion over 16 years, we were told that the incentives would grow—or at least maintain—good family-wage jobs.

We’d been burned before by 2003 incentives that failed to stop Boeing from expanding 787 production outside the state despite a multi-billion tax break. So in 2013, when the incentives were extended from 2024 to 2040, the Legislature added “intent” language to guarantee all 777X assembly and wing assembly would be performed here.

But within weeks of its passage, we got burned again. Boeing announced it would move thousands of engineering jobs out of state and out of country. Unlike tax incentives in Missouri, South Carolina and other states, there were still no requirements to ensure that the tax breaks actually increase jobs.

But aerospace tax breaks don’t just go to Boeing, they also go to hundreds of suppliers. More than one-third (38 percent) of non-Boeing aerospace employees in the state earn less than $15 per hour—hours workers’ families qualify for state assistance for health care, housing and other basic necessities.

In other words, because our incentives lack the accountability standards required in most states, taxpayers are subsidizing one of biggest corporations in the world even as it sheds jobs in our state. Plus, we are subsidizing low-wage aerospace companies whose employees can’t meet their families’ basic needs.

So in 2015, the Society of Professional Engineers, Employers in Aerospace/EFTE 2001 and Machinists Union District Lodge 751 backed changing our tax incentive law to create some accountability.

HB 2147, sponsored by Rep. June Robinson (D-Everett), tied Boeing’s aerospace incentives to maintaining state employment. It would cut the size of Boeing’s tax break when employment falls below the Oct. 31, 2013, baseline of 83,295 employees.

HB 1786, from Rep. Mia Gregerson (D-SeaTac), required aerospace firms receiving the incentives to pay veteran employees at least the state median wage for a one-earner family, or about $52,000 per year.

Boeing and other aerospace workers packed a March 13 hearing to support the bills, but they didn’t advance in 2015. With polls showing that more than two-thirds of Washington voters support tying aerospace tax breaks to maintaining jobs with livable wages, these bills will be back.

Little accomplished for injured workers

GOP pursues usual cuts, but fails

By JOE KENDO

The 2015 Legislature indulged in a lot of bluster and public theater on the issue, but accomplished little with respect to the workers’ compensation safety net for injured workers. As in past sessions, conservative factions and the business interests they serve vowed to cut or deny injured workers’ benefits.

The 2015 Legislature indulged in a lot of bluster on workers’ compensation during appeals (HB 1613), and another would have made it functionally impossible for workers suffering from an occupational disease to secure the treatment they need to get well, get back to work, and move on with their lives.

But not everything was so bleak this session. Working with our community partners, the Washington State Labor Council supported legislation that would have allowed workers with Permanent Partial Disabilities to continue to receive medical treatment in instances where their claims were prematurely closed (HB 1613). Another WSLC-supported bill would have secured attorney fees and costs for injured workers in court settlements when they pre- vailed during appeals (HB 1613), and another would have increased penalties for self-insured employers who fail to meet their legal obligations to pay benefits pending hearings before the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals (HB 1612). These bills failed to receive a floor vote in the House, but the WSLC will continue to seek justice for these workers.

An investment in Washington

Transportation package and capital budget build our state

By JOE KENDO

It is a good time to live in Washington. Our economy is clearly on the upswing after years of stagnant job and wage growth. The state population growth is nearly three times what it was during the 2008 recession are primed and ready for work. People from all over the country are pouring into our state for new job opportunities, vibrant communities, natural beauty, and diverse culture across the state. The Office of Financial Management estimates an additional 1.2 million Washingtonians by 2030, and nearly 8.8 mil- lion people in total by 2040. That’s nearly two million more people than live in Washington today.

While we welcome the economic growth and cultural vibrancy these transplants bring, we also live with the negative consequences of unplanned growth on a daily basis. These people will need jobs, and they will need reliable transportation options to get there.

In 2011, the Seattle-to-Everett commuter average 62 minutes. That’s two fewer hours per day, every day, to spend with one’s family, church, or recreational sports league. Two fewer hours helping a child with math homework, or cooking healthy meals, or simply relaxing after working your shift. By 2014, that commute increased another 18 minutes—which means nearly three hours of commuting time on a day in a car, inching through Shoreline, Mountlake Terrace, and Lynnwood.

This is not an insurmountable problem. But for too long our elected leaders have been unable to buoy the economy, or of the people of our state—present and future—against base political instincts and demands for a free lunch. But finally, during the unlikely atmosphere of legislative sessions, the 2015 Legislature made nearly $35 billion in job-creating infrastructure investments and education but failed to establish a reliable framework to put Washingtonians to work and improve our quality of life for another generation.

The elusive state transportation package took three years and nearly 100 hearings before the Legislature to complete, but its passage will ensure an equitable distribution of mobility infrastructure and job opportunities statewide.

More than $16 billion will be invested over the next 16 years with new ferry lanes, roads, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit resources. An additional $15 billion will be raised, pending approval by central Puget Sound vote- ers, to build the third stage of Sound Transit’s Link Light Rail which will provide reliable, congestion-free travel options for workers and their families in King County and North Pierce counties, Redmond and Issaquah, and Lynnwood and Everett, as well as connect East and West Seattle and Ballard to the waterfront already opening through Seattle. This will have the added bon- us of reducing workers’ reliance on carbon intensive car-oriented commuting, and reduce the overall cost of transportation between the suburbs and the dense urban cores where so many people work.

But that’s not all. To ensure our state is meeting its needs for clean energy jobs, water infrastructure, and affordable housing investments, budget negotiators agreed on a $3 billion capital budget to do so in 2014. These investments include housing options for farm workers and seniors, new school buildings to help reduce class sizes, and tens of millions of dollars for research and development in support of clean energy technology.

These investments act as a trellis upon which our population and economy can sustainably grow. Whether you live in Seattle, Spokane, Kent, Marysville, Everett, Lakewood, or Walla Walla, opportunities for eco- nomic improvement will increase. Our commutes will be safer and more reliable, and even if there is another economic downturn on the horizon, a massive public investment of nearly $35 billion over 16 years will still drive good, family wage employment, in cutting edge, forward looking industries.

We can do big things. When workers, businesses, transit advocates, environmental stewards, communi- ties of color, farmers, farm workers, and land use planners come together, we can do them better.
Some votes that didn’t happen

Lots of bills that would have had a major impact for Washington’s working families never got a vote. But you can tell who supports the good, bad and ugly bills by checking the list of sponsors. Here are some of those bills and the legislators who signed on as co-sponsors. (Democrats are listed in bold.)

**THE GOOD**

- **HB 1354/SB 5569—WAGE THEFT RETALIATION**—Protecting workers from retaliation for speaking up about wage theft and requesting rightfully earned wages
  
  SPONSORS: Rep. Cindy Ryni (D-Shoreline) and Sen. Bob Hasegawa (D-Seattle)

- **HB 1716—FAMILY UNITY ACT**—Making communities safer and keeping immigrant families together by ensuring that local law enforcement agencies focus on their primary missions of serving and protecting the community, instead of immigration enforcement.
  
  SPONSOR: Rep. Luis Moscoso (D-Milwaukee Terrace)

- **HB 1733/SB 5672—SAFE NURSE STAFFING**—Directing the Department of Health to establish and enforce patient assignment limits and set a maximum number that can be assigned to each registered nurse.
  
  SPONSOR: Rep. Eileen Cody (D-Seattle) and Sen. Steve Conway (D-Tacoma)

- **SB 5322—PRE-EMPTING LOCAL STANDARDS**—Pre-empting local jurisdictions’ ordinances, such as SeaTac’s minimum wage and Seattle’s sick leave, and all future ordinances to change how they are applied to union members. This would create conflicts with collectively bargained contracts, such as building trades workers’ hour banks for purposes of sick leave.
  
  SPONSOR: Sen. John Braun (R-Centralia)

- **SB 5514—MINIMUM WAGE/O.T. EXCUSE**—Creating a “good-faith” defense for employers that fail to pay minimum or overtime wages.
  
  SPONSOR: Sen. John Braun (R-Centralia)

**THE BAD**

- **HB 1194—AG GAG**—An American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) model bill making it a crime to document what happens on farms without the owner’s written consent.
  
  SPONSOR: Rep. Joe Schmick (R-Colfax)

- **SB 5329—PUBLIC BARGAINING**—Politicizing all state employee collective bargaining talks by making them open public meetings. This bill was pushed by the right-wing anti-union Freedom Foundation.
  
  SPONSOR: Rep. Matt Shea (R-Spokane Valley)

**THE UGLY**

- **HB 2068—“RIGHT-TO-WORK”**—Making Washington an anti-union so-called “right-to-work” state that bans union-security agreements.
  
  SPONSOR: Rep. Matt Shea (R-Spokane Valley)

- **SB 5405-HB 2068—PROMOTING “RIGHT-TO-WORK”**—Promoting the decertification of public employees’ union-security clauses in all state, county and municipal employees’ contracts in Washington state.
  
  SPONSOR: Sen. Jan Angel (R-Port Orchard) and Rep. Jesse Young (R-Gig Harbor)

- **SB 5240—WORKERS’ COMP PRIVATIZATION**—Privatizing our state-run workers’ compensation system, an idea overwhelmingly rejected by voters in every county of the state.
  
  SPONSOR: Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane)

- **SB 5671—BANNING UNION SECURITY**—Expanding the Harris v. Quinn decision to create so-called “right-to-work” bargaining restrictions for family child care providers, adult family home providers, language access providers, and home care providers.
  
  SPONSOR: Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane)

TODAY the future

These young men were among the more than 800 union members and their families who gathered on Feb. 20 on the steps of the State Capitol. They were rallying in support of the Washington State Labor Council’s Shared Prosperity Agenda and against legislative attacks on workers’ freedom of association, apprenticeship programs, and wage standards.

Looking to the future
ESSB 5990 (King)—Exempt transportation projects from sales tax; siphons money from schools and operating budget. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 26-23, Mar. 10)

ESSB 5991 (King)—Shift funds from Environmental Legacy Stewardship Account to pay for unrelated projects. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 27-22, Feb. 27)

ESB 5513 (Braun)—Expand compromise-and-release settlements by lowering age limit for injured workers. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 28-21, Mar. 10)

ESSB 5226 (Becker)—Mandate onerous financial reports for unions. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 26-22, Mar. 10)

ESSB 5899 (Liias)—Relax restrictions on payday loans. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 30-18, Mar. 10)

ESSB 5854 (Braun)—Post collective bargaining agreements online for all public employee contracts. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 30-19, Mar. 11)

ESSB 5748 (Litzow)—Evaluate teachers and principals based on student test scores. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 26-23, Mar. 11)

HB 1356 (Jinkins)—All employees in Washington must save for retirement. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 51-46, Mar. 5)

ESB 1745 (Moscoso)—Washington State Voting Rights Act. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 77-17, Mar. 3)

ESSB 5701 (Litzow)—Evaluate teachers and principals based on student test scores. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 26-23, Mar. 11)

SSB 6088 (Braun)—Relax class-size requirements in voter-approved Initiative 1351. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 27-22, Apr. 6)

ESSB 5977 (Hill)—Operating budget that included attacks on collective bargaining and other bad policy. “Right” vote: NO (Passed 26-23, Apr. 6)

ESB 5863 (Jayapal)—Promote apprenticeship programs for highway construction workers. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 38-9, Apr. 16)

SHB 1089 (Hunt, S.)—Promote responsible bidders on public contracts by setting restrictions for wage violators. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 60-38, Feb. 16)

HB 1355 (Farrell)—Raise state minimum wage to $12 an hour over four years. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 51-46, Mar. 3)

HB 1356 (Jinkins)—Establish insurance requirement for drivers of commercial transportation services. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 77-17, Mar. 3)

HBS 1745 (Moscoso)—Washington State Voting Rights Act. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 77-17, Mar. 3)

HB 1590 (Reykdal)—Promote apprenticeship for electricians. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 52-46, Mar. 5)

HB 1541 (Santos)—Close education opportunity gap. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 53-45, Mar. 5)

HB 1230 (Sill)—Allow authorization of interest arbitration when there has been an Unfair Labor Practice. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 51-47, Mar. 6)

HB 1863 (Reykdal)—Step pay increases for public employees at state community and technical colleges. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 64-34, Mar. 6)

HB 1584 (Senn)—Equal Pay Opportunity Act empowering workers to combat workplace discrimination. “Right” vote: YES (Passed 53-43, Mar. 11)
The Washington State Labor Council 2015 Shared Prosperity Agenda recognized the important role that public education has in our state. It’s a priority echoed by clear directives from both the courts in the McCleary decision calling for adequate funding of education and the public with the passage of I-1351 calling for smaller class sizes.

As our agenda noted: “For too long the state government has not sufficiently funded what is supposed to be its paramount duty: public education. As a result, our K-12 public schools have suffered under unacceptable teacher-student ratios, underpaid schools have suffered under unacceptable teacher-student ratios, underpaid and underfunded. As a result, our K-12 public schools have suffered under unacceptable teacher-student ratios, underpaid and underfunded.

Adequate funding of education has in our state. It’s a priority echoed by clear directives from both the courts in the McCleary decision calling for adequate funding of education and the public with the passage of I-1351 calling for smaller class sizes.

Short-term fixes only for education

For years, the hard-working faculty members at our state’s Community and Technical Colleges (CTC) have sought the right all other teachers have: to bargain over local funds for step increases in pay. In 2015, thanks to some persuasive bargaining by House Democratic budget negotiators, they finally got it—but only temporarily.

Current law says that only state appropriations can finance such increases. As state funding for higher education has declined and college tuition and fees have increased, these local funds now account for more than half the funding at 21 of 34 CTCs.

It makes no sense to keep local funds off limits for step increases, unless your goal is to suppress already-lagging CTC faculty wages. So, as it has since 2010, AFT Washington supported legislation this year to change that law. HB 1863, sponsored by Rep. Chris Reykdal (D-Olympia), passed the House 64-34 (House Vote #9, Page 5), but Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane) wouldn’t even hear, much less vote on the bill in his Senate Commerce and Labor Committee. So it died, again.

But then, House Democrats resurgeted Reykdal’s proposal during negotiations for the operating budget. In the budget that ultimately passed, a proviso was included to allow CTC faculty to negotiate for step increases using local funds for the 2015-17 biennium.

“This sets the stage for narrowing the 20% salary gap between CTC faculty and Washington Public Employees/AFSCME Council 28, Teamsters Local 117, SEIU Health-Care 1199NW, PTE Local 17, AFT Washington, Washington Public Employees Association/IFCWF 365, and others. The coalition raised awareness of the important work state employees do and called for community support for full funding of the contracts. The Public Service Matters Campaign included actions at the Capitol and in communities across the state, newspaper and radio ads, support from local business owners, and more.

It wasn’t until hours before a July 1 shutdown, for which 26,000 state employees had been issued pink-slip warnings, that Sen. Hill and Senate Republican leaders finally agreed to fund the state employee contracts in the 2015-17 operating budget.

About a week later, Gov. Inslee officially signed the contracts granting the long-awaited raises and maintaining health-care benefits.

Our state employees have made significant sacrifices in recent years. The people who keep our communities safe, care for the elderly and disabled, teach and protect our children, maintain our roads, and provide other essential services have not had a general pay increase in seven years. In fact, for two of those years amid the Great Recession, state workers took 3 percent pay cuts, furloughs and layoffs.

Last year, the unions representing state employees negotiated contracts with the Governor’s Office that would grant them their first modest wage increases in seven years—4.8 percent spread over the next two years.

In contrast to his predecessor, who negotiated contracts with raises and respect for workers and families. In addition, we have a keen interest in ensuring the health and survival of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at South Seattle College, and the Labor Archives at the University of Washington—our two publically funded labor programs.

So, what happened?

First the bad news. While both the governor’s budget and the House budget included additional funding for LERC and the Labor Archives, the final budget cut additional funding for LERC. Unions have provided LERC resources to supplement its base budget—enough to hire a second labor educator and a part-time support staff. Unfortunately, the new budget provides only enough for the director and one labor educator. It is one in the series of attempts by the Senate Republicans to undermine the labor movement in our state.

Happily, the Labor Archives did receive an additional $400,000. Therefore, a strong labor education program will require our continued commitment.

There was some good news for public education in this session. After many long years without, the budget provides a 4.8 percent cost-of-living adjustment over two years for K-12 teachers, community and technical college faculty, technical college classified employees, and K-12 school support staff. Two-year college faculty also finally won what other educators have always had—the right to bargain local funds for professional development and experience (step) increases during the 2015-2017 fiscal biennium.

A small decrease in student tuition was welcome and will help keep the cost of higher education from skyrocketing further. But the 13.8 percent increase in the higher education budget doesn’t cover all of the loss from tuition cuts.

The K-12 system’s budget was increased a welcome 13.1 percent, but this fell far short of funding the I-1351 class-size reductions sought by voters beyond grade 3. In final budget negotiations, Senate Democrats were able to force a temporary reform that will allow 2,000 high school students who passed all required courses but couldn’t pass a high-stakes biology test to graduate.

It was disappointing that these modest gains took a nearly two-year passage and three special sessions to accomplish. It was also disappointing that our one statewide Labor Education program was left without adequate resources.

In the end, the Legislature failed to address Washington’s ongoing revenue crisis in a meaningful way. We can’t provide good public education under a broken tax system (see next page). There were solutions offered this session, including the capital gains tax and closing tax loopholes for big profitable companies, but the Senate majority would not compromise on such long-term fixes.

So we must continue our work—not only to elect legislators who will champion the shared goals of all of us, but also to run our own initiatives that properly fund education and improve the lives of people in this state.
Over the past 25 years, state revenue collections as a share of the economy have dropped by nearly 30 percent.

Our tax system: Unsustainable, unfair

Conservatives like to point out that state tax receipts—in terms of dollars—have gone up since the Great Recession. So they say, there’s no need to raise revenue. But that argument ignores Washington’s growing population and businesses that create demand for more state services. The better measure of whether our tax system is sufficient and sustainable is whether revenue as a percentage of state economic activity is stable.

It’s not. In fact, by that measure, state revenue is down by nearly 30 percent over the past 25 years (see chart above). State budgets passed during and since the Great Recession ignored our broken tax system and cut billions of dollars in funding for infrastructure, schools, colleges, public safety, mental health, and other critical services our families rely on.

That’s why legislators found themselves under court order to restore some of that funding this year.

Meanwhile, Washington’s system has become the most unfair tax system in the nation. The wealthiest 1% pay just 2.4% of their total income in state taxes. Middle-class families pay four times that rate, and low-income families pay seven times that rate. Low-wage and middle-class workers pay more than their fair share. But big corporations and the wealthiest among us simply aren’t paying their fair share.

Five of our state’s biggest industries—aerospace, high-tech, agriculture, timber and mining—combine to contribute just 4% of all the B&O taxes collected last year, while smaller businesses were responsible for paying the rest.

In 2015, House Democrats proposed taking a first step to-ward making our tax system a little more fair and sustainable with HB 2224, sponsored by Rep. Reuven Carlyle (D-Seattle). It would have the very wealthiest in the state pay a 5% tax on large investment transactions, or capital gains. Washington is one of only nine states with no such tax. HB 2224 also would have closed some tax breaks for large profitable corporations.

House Democrats sought to have these proposals included in the final budget, but Senate Republicans would not budge and steadfastly protected the wealthy and big corporations from having to pay any more to restore funding for schools and other critical services.

But the conversation about improving Washington’s tax system advanced in 2015, thanks to the work of Washington United for Fair Revenue, a statewide grassroots campaign supported by the Washington State Labor Council and more than 100 other community, labor and business organizations. This coalition will continue to fight to update and improve Washington’s tax system.

Senate kills WA Voting Rights Act

By TERESA MOSQUEDA

This year marked the 50th anniversary of the national Voting Rights Act’s passage in Congress. On this important anniversary, and on the heels of the historic federal ruling in Yakima that demanded the city implement districting to address racially polarized voting, the Washington State Voting Rights Act was introduced in the Legislature for the third year in a row.

Led by sponsor Rep. Luis Moscoso (D-Mountlake Terrace), HB 1745/SB 5668 quickly moved through the House with bipartisan support. (See House Vote 85, Page 5.) In the Senate, championed by sponsor Sen. Cyrus Habib (D-Kirkland) and freshman Sen. Pramila Jayapal (D-Seattle), community organizers, unions, and faith groups continued to push until the last day for the WVRA to come to the Senate floor.

But, despite having bipartisan support and the votes necessary to pass the Senate, Republican leaders refused to allow a vote. This marks the third consecutive year the bill has died in the Senate chamber.

The bill has been negotiated, it has been debated, and it deserved a vote in the Senate. The time for waiting or further study is over, as the WSLC told those who wanted to kick the can down the road yet again. For decades, Latinos have been denied an equal opportunity to influence local elections in some ar- eas of the state. Now the majority in many cities and even some counties, Latino representation in local government has not kept up with the changing demographics. These votes deserve to be recognized.

While the 50th anniversary of the national Voting Rights Act is historic, we held back our celebration and kept working for the WVRA as we know racially polarized voting continues to this day in Washington state. We will be back, working in coalition next year to pass the WVRA to make every Washington vote count.

Health Care Is a Human Right movement gains steam in ‘15

By TERESA MOSQUEDA

Health Care Is a Human Right!

That’s more than just a slogan, it’s a movement in our state. Staffed by WSLC and led by community and affiliate partners, the Health Care Is a Human Right Coalition supported in- tent legislation to cover all Washingtonians by 2020. This effort mimicked the strategy used a decade earlier to cover all kids. In 2005, intent legis- lation was passed, and in 2007, the policy details were finalized.

While this year’s bill didn’t pass, it succeeded in highlighting the need to improve coverage and access for all, and exposed how many Wash- ingtonians still lack access to com-prehensive, affordable or accessible care. HB 1321 (Rep. June Robinson) and SB 5365 (Sen. David Frockt) put the goals of the Health Care Is a Human Right Coalition on the radar of the Legislature. More than half of the Democrats in each chamber co-sponsored the bills. Through lobby- ing, testimony, stories and letters, we explained that not everyone has coverage, health care is not affordable for all, families are falling through the cracks, and therefore, we must continue to improve our system.

The effort was supplemented by robust field mobilization via Wash- ington CAN’s canvassing, which signed up more than 18,000 individuals to be part of the Health Care Is a Human Right Coalition. With this power, next year we will be back with these stories in hand and we’ll turn up the volume on the call for health coverage for all Washingtonians.

Hundreds of union film and television crew members staged an apocalyptic film set, complete with zombies, at the Capitol on March 17.

It was an effort to educate lawmakers about the importance of Washington Filmworks, the state’s film incentive that has good job-creation standards and protections. Legislators had a chance to tour a staged set inspired by Z-Nation, a popular series on the SyFy network filmed in Spokane, thanks to Washington’s film incentive program.

(Photos by Heather Weiner)

Zombies Attack!
Every Democrat supports minimum wage, sick leave

By TERESA MOSQUEDA

This session, the House of Representatives made substantial progress in promoting shared prosperity in Washington state by passing legislation to increase the state minimum wage and to provide all workers the opportunity to earn paid safe and sick leave.

The House advanced a minimum wage increase to $12/hour, phased in over four years. Sponsored by Rep. Jessyn Farrell (D-Seattle), HB 1355 cleared multiple committee hurdles to reach the floor on March 3 so the people of Washington can see where their representatives stand on the issue. (See House Vote #2, Page 5.) Also that day, the House voted on HB 1356, the Safe and Sick Leave bill sponsored by Rep. Laurie Jinkins (D-Tacoma). (House Vote #3, Page 5.) The bills advanced with every single Democratic member voting for both bills. They then moved to the Republican-controlled Senate, where the bills sat without a hearing for nearly a month.

A month of lobbying, letters, calls, and public outcry, the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee finally held a hearing on them. Chair, Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane), clearly never wanted to hear them, let alone move the bills out of committee, but public pressure for a fair and balanced hearing could not be silenced or ignored. The March 30 hearing was a critical opportunity for community and business leaders, workers, and their families to speak to the need for a higher minimum wage and paid sick leave. The proponents, real workers and small business owners, vastly outnumbered the few industry lobbyist opponents.

These two landmark bills were the first in a series moving the bills out of committee despite the fact that a 2014 poll showed that 65% of Washington voters support the gradual phase in to $12/hour, and more than 76% of voters support requiring all employers to provide sick and safe leave. Neither of these issues should be partisan. Low-wage workers and local economies throughout the state would have benefited from passage of these bills. In the 2014 national elections, voters in several red states passed ballot measures to raise the minimum wage and allow all workers to earn paid sick and safe leave.

Since the Senate did not approve the modest proposals, the WSLC will be back next year with faster, more proactive timelines for implementation, because working families cannot wait any longer to have an economy that works for all, not just the wealthy few.

Wage Theft

All workers, whether they live and work in red or blue areas of the state, believe the same thing: If you work hard and play by the rules, your work should be rewarded. But that isn’t true for thousands of workers across Washington who have had their wages stolen by their employers.

Wage theft is a crime and yet it continues to grow. In Washington, if a worker speaks up about wage theft and is retaliated against or fired, there are no administrative protections for the worker. In reality, there are no significant consequences for employers who break the law by retaliating against workers or stealing wages. Because fines are so low and administrative consequences non-existent, wage theft has become a pervasive business model in many industries, including construction, janitorial, retail, service, restaurants, painting, and many more.

For the third straight year, the Stop Wage Theft Coalition and the Shared Prosperity Coalition pushed a package of legislation to address wage theft by:


Addressing the misclassification of workers HB 1519/SB 5566 by Rep. Marcus Riccelli (D-Spokane) and Sen. David Frockt (D-Seattle).

Providing a path to better recover wages owed — HB 1318/SB 5567 by Rep. Mia Gregerson (D-SeatTac) and Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent).

Increasing penalties for wage theft—HB 1006/SB 5568 by Rep. David Sawyer (D-Tacoma) and Sen. Steve Conway (D-Tacoma).

All workers, whether they live and work in red or blue areas of the state, believe the same thing: If you work hard and play by the rules, your work should be rewarded. But that isn’t true for thousands of workers across Washington who have had their wages stolen by their employers.

Wage theft is a crime and yet it continues to grow. In Washington, if a worker speaks up about wage theft and is retaliated against or fired, there are no administrative protections for the worker. In reality, there are no significant consequences for employers who break the law by retaliating against workers or stealing wages. Because fines are so low and administrative consequences non-existent, wage theft has become a pervasive business model in many industries, including construction, janitorial, retail, service, restaurants, painting, and many more.

For the third straight year, the Stop Wage Theft Coalition and the Shared Prosperity Coalition pushed a package of legislation to address wage theft by:


Addressing the misclassification of workers HB 1519/SB 5566 by Rep. Marcus Riccelli (D-Spokane) and Sen. David Frockt (D-Seattle).

Providing a path to better recover wages owed — HB 1318/SB 5567 by Rep. Mia Gregerson (D-SeatTac) and Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent).

Increasing penalties for wage theft—HB 1006/SB 5568 by Rep. David Sawyer (D-Tacoma) and Sen. Steve Conway (D-Tacoma).

While the minimum wage and paid sick and safe leave bills passed out of the House, the third leg of the Shared Prosperity stool — protection from retaliation and wage theft — never made it to the House floor for a vote.

The same low-wage workers who would have benefited from an increase in the minimum wage also experience retaliation and wage theft. The same low-wage workers who have no sick or safe leave also experience retaliation and wage theft. Thus, we have our marching orders: we need worker stories and to increase wages and protections for workers across Washington.

Union members are briefed at the WSLC Legislative Lobbying Conference on Feb. 20 before heading to the Capitol to talk to their state legislators.

“People who work full time shouldn’t live in poverty and require public assistance to meet basic needs. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and losing pay. These are core values held by most of us. The state representatives who supported these measures deserve our thanks for taking concrete steps to help struggling working families in this era of historic income inequality.”

— WSLC President Jeff Johnson

People who work full time shouldn’t live in poverty and require public assistance to meet basic needs. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and losing pay. These are core values held by most of us. The state representatives who supported these measures deserve our thanks for taking concrete steps to help struggling working families in this era of historic income inequality.”

— WSLC President Jeff Johnson

People who work full time shouldn’t live in poverty and require public assistance to meet basic needs. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and losing pay. These are core values held by most of us. The state representatives who supported these measures deserve our thanks for taking concrete steps to help struggling working families in this era of historic income inequality.”

“People who work full time shouldn’t live in poverty and require public assistance to meet basic needs. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and losing pay. These are core values held by most of us. The state representatives who supported these measures deserve our thanks for taking concrete steps to help struggling working families in this era of historic income inequality.”

— WSLC President Jeff Johnson

People who work full time shouldn’t live in poverty and require public assistance to meet basic needs. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between caring for a sick child and losing pay. These are core values held by most of us. The state representatives who supported these measures deserve our thanks for taking concrete steps to help struggling working families in this era of historic income inequality.”