



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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FINALLY!

Action on capital budget, voting rights

Hostage crisis ends as capital budget passes, but the damage has been done

OLYMPIA -- For nearly a year now, Senate Republicans have held hostage more than \$4 billion worth of job-creating school construction and public infrastructure projects over an unrelated water-rights issue, known as Hirst. After gaining control of the Senate in last fall's special election, Democratic leaders vowed quick action to pass the capital budget. But until this week, they delayed that action as a "sign of good faith" with Republicans, as Hirst negotiations appeared to be nearing a resolution.

Negotiators from the House and Senate reached a deal late Tuesday night, and after briefing legislators on the "Hirst fix," both houses quickly passed both the Hirst bill (SB 6091) and then the capital budget bills (SB 6090). There was never any question whether the capital budget has bipartisan support. Last year it passed the House on a near-unanimous 92-1 vote before it was taken hostage in the Senate to become a Hirst bargaining chip. When finally allowed a vote on Thursday, it passed the House 95-1 and the Senate 49-0.

Immediately, legislators have begun issuing press releases touting its passage and the local projects it funds in their districts. But unfortunately, significant damage was done. The hostage politics cost the jobs of a number of state employees and significantly raised the costs of shovel-ready projects that had to be suspended, awaiting the capital budget's approval.

As housing advocates noted this week (here and here), because the capital budget failed to pass by Wednesday, multiple affordable housing projects — including a \$21 million seven-floor apartment complex to shelter 54 domestic violence victims and their families — missed an important deadline to apply for federal matching funds.

The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO is thankful that new Democratic control of the Senate apparently broke the logjam and allowed a fair vote on a capital budget that everyone from both parties supported. We are hopeful that this unprec-



edented and costly hijacking of our state's construction budget doesn't happen again in future years.

After last-gasp delay, voting rights moves

They postponed action on voting rights for five years. So they must've figured, "What's another day or two?"

For five years, Senate Republicans refused to allow an up-or-down vote on the Washington Voting Rights Act (HB 1800/SB 6002), legislation repeatedly approved by the House that creates a path to change discriminatory local voting systems without the need for costly lawsuits. But now that Democrats have gained control of the Senate, SB 6002 sponsored by Sen. Rebecca Saldaña (D-Seattle) was brought to the floor for a vote on Wednesday.

After debating and rejecting multiple GOP-sponsored amendments that would have weakened or gutted the bill, the

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WVRA was finally ready for its floor vote. Almost.

Republicans made a procedural move that forced a super-majority vote to advance the bill to “third reading” within 24 hours of its “second reading.” Or something like that. In the end, because Senate Democrats have a narrow one-vote majority, the GOP maneuver effectively delayed the final vote by another day or two.

UPDATE! The Washington Voting Rights Act (SB 6002) has passed the Senate on a 29-19 vote. Here is the roll call:

ESSB 6002 — Voting rights act — 3rd Reading & Final Passage 1/19/2018 — Yeas: 29 Nays: 19 Excused: 1 (Democrats in bold.)

Voting Yea: Senators **Billig, Carlyle, Chase, Cleveland, Conway, Darneille, Dhingra, Fain, Frockt, Hasegawa, Hawkins, Hobbs, Hunt, Keiser, Kuderer, Liias, McCoy, Miloscia, Mullet, Nelson, Palumbo, Pedersen, Ranker, Rolfes, Saldaña, Sheldon, Takko, Van De Wege, Wellman**

Voting Nay: Senators Angel, Bailey, Becker, Braun, Brown, Erickson, Fortunato, Honeyford, King, O`Ban, Padden, Rivers, Schoessler, Short, Wagoner, Walsh, Warnick, Wilson, Zeiger

Excused: Senator Baumgartner

Meanwhile, the House version — HB 1800 sponsored by Rep. Mia Gregerson (D-SeaTac) — advanced from the House Committee on State Government, Elections & Information Technology on Tuesday, and could get (another) vote in the House soon as well.

It appears that the long wait to create more equitable, accountable election systems in Washington state may soon be over.

Status report on Shared Prosperity Agenda

Committee and floor action has been fast and furious in the 60-day 2018 session. Here’s a quick update on some of the other bills from the Washington State Labor Council’s Shared Prosperity Agenda, and where they stand at press time:

■ **HANFORD OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE** (HB 1723/SB 5940) — Cleaning one of the most toxic places on Earth, Hanford workers are exposed to unknown combinations of dangerous chemicals and radioactive materials. By adopting a presumption in our workers’ compensation law that certain cancers and other illness are due to exposure to these hazards, the people of Washington will commit to helping these heroic men and women. HB 1723 passed the House 76-22 and is scheduled for action in Senate Labor & Commerce on Monday, Jan. 22. SB 5940 advanced from Senate Labor & Commerce and is available for a floor vote.

■ **HOSPITAL WORKER BREAKS AND OVERTIME** (HB 1715) — Healthcare facilities should ensure that nurses and healthcare technical workers are guaranteed access to the breaks and overtime they have earned. This will ensure those providing the best care are healthy, rested, and less prone to mistake-causing

fatigue. Passed the House 56-42, now before Senate Labor & Commerce.

■ **RAILROAD STAFFING** (HB 1669/SB 5846) — To prevent devastating fatigue caused, train derailment accidents, railroad companies should have to meet minimum staffing levels, especially for trains carrying hazardous materials. HB 1669 advanced from House Labor & Workplace Standards on Thursday, and may soon be available for a floor vote.

■ **FAIR CHANCE ACT** (HB 1298/SB 6110) — When formerly incarcerated persons have fulfilled their debt to society, they should be able to secure work. By “banning the box” and waiting until after an interview to ask about criminal history, they will have a fair chance to make their case to potential employers. HB 1298 advanced from House Labor & Workplace Standards and is available for a floor vote.

■ **KEEP WASHINGTON WORKING** (HB 1985/SB 5689) — Immigrants are integral to our state’s thriving economy — as workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs. By working with Department of Commerce, labor, business and immigrant advocacy groups can develop strategies collaboratively to help support the state’s current and future industries, while establishing statewide guidelines that prevent unconstitutional detention and profiling. SB 5689 has advanced from Senate Labor & Commerce and referred to Senate Ways & Means.

■ **LEGAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATION REFORM** (HB 1783) — By breaking the prison-to-debt-to-prison cycle, the Legislature can help formerly incarcerated people secure a productive future, and pay restitution to victims. Changing how the costs of jail and prison are paid and calculated can be the difference between recidivism and reform. Passed the House 86-12, now before Senate Law & Justice.

■ **DISCLOSE ACT** (HB 2455/SB 5991) — Dark money (secret political spending) in our elections is poisoning our politics. The Legislature should make sure that political money spent through front groups is publicly disclosed. SB 5991 passed the Senate 32-17. HB 2455 is scheduled for action today in the House State Government Committee.

■ **BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL** (HB 1508) — Kids needs reliable, heathy breakfasts at the start of the school day to ensure they are ready to learn. By providing all of our school children adequate nutrition, we can start to close the achievement gap and ensure that kids experiencing poverty are not stigmatized. Passed the House 83-15, now before Senate Ways & Means (hearing at 3:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 24).

■ **FACULTY BARGAINING** (HB 1237/SB 5993) — Community and Technical Colleges should be able utilize local funding sources in negotiations with faculty. Like the four-year colleges do, access to these local funds will help our CTCs recruit and retain top faculty, and ensure backbone of our higher education system is strong. HB 1237 is available for a House floor vote.