



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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‘Preemption’ power grabs aim to usurp cities

GOP trying to block local governments from pursuing employment policies

OLYMPIA -- At last week's Legislative Lobbying Conference of Washington State Labor Council, hundreds of union members were reminded that several from their own ranks — including some attending that conference — were elected last fall to help lead their city governments.

Folks like the Teamsters' Pedro Olguin on the Burien City Council, IBEW's Matthew Hepner on the East Wenatchee City Council, IAM's "Landslide Larry" Brown on the Auburn City Council, and the WSLC's own Teresa Mosqueda on the Seattle City Council, among others. As an AFL-CIO video released this week points out, many of these newly elected union members are the product of a concerted effort to recruit and elect candidates from within labor's ranks to public office. After all, the best way to make sure the interests of working people are represented is to elect working people!

Why was this important in the context of what's happening in the Legislature? Because watching union members get elected scares right-wing conservatives and corporate lobbying groups in Olympia. They don't like to see cities enacting progressive policies on the minimum wage, sick leave, family leave, and other workplace standards. So they are actively working to take away the power of local elected officials — and local voters — to do so.

Legislative Republicans have introduced dozens of bills and amendments in recent years to “preempt” local governments from enacting their own innovative employment policies that go beyond the floor established in state law. This legislation, championed nationwide by corporate bill mills like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), are a power grab to usurp the authority of local elected officials and voters.

With Democrats now in control of both houses of the Washington State Legislature, pro-worker bills blocked for years by Senate Republicans are finally getting votes. That means Republicans have stepped up their efforts to insert preemption language into legislation.

Most recently, Rep. Matt Manweller (R-Ellensburg) on Wednesday tried to amend preemption language onto the Fair



Chance Act (HB 1298). Also known as the “Ban the Box” bill, HB 1298 would require employers to wait until after job interviews to inquire about applicants' criminal histories. This will give formerly incarcerated people a fair chance to make their case for the job.

Manweller's preemption amendment, which would have killed local “ban the box” ordinances like the one recently enacted in Spokane, was narrowly rejected on a party-line vote. The House then approved the underlying bill on a 52-46 vote.

The WSLC urges the Senate to pass this important bill as well, without usurping the authority of local governments and blocking them from pursuing their own innovative policies that may better suit their communities.

Bills that GOT VOTES

In addition to the aforementioned Fair Chance Act, some other labor-supported bills got floor votes since our last newsletter, including:

- **FACULTY COLLECTIVE BARGAINING** (HB 1237 sponsored by Rep. Mike Sells, D-Everett) — Community and technical colleges should be allowed to utilize local funding

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sources in negotiations with faculty over wages and benefits, like four-year colleges do. Access to these local funds will help our CTCs recruit and retain top faculty. Passed the House 57-41 on Feb. 7. This bill easily passed the House last year, too, but was blocked from a vote by Senate Republicans who, this year, are no longer in the majority.

■ **WORKERS' COMP SOCIAL SECURITY OFFSETS** (HB 1336, Rep. Steve Kirby, D-Tacoma) — As retired workers return to the workforce part-time to make ends meet, work injury rates among older workers have increased. HB 1336 would end the practice of offsetting time-loss wage replacement for injured workers who also collect Social Security benefits, as these workers already face financial challenges. Passed the House 65-33 on Feb. 7.

■ **BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL** (HB 1508, Rep. Monica Stonier, D-Vancouver) — Kids need reliable, healthy 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 and the Senate 43-5 on Jan. 31.

Bills that NEED VOTES

The cutoff deadline for bills not related to the budget to pass from their houses of origin is this Wednesday, Feb. 14. Among the labor-backed bills that still need votes by then are:

■ **TAXPAYER ACCOUNTABILITY ACT** (HB 1851, Rep. Laurie Dolan, D-Olympia) — This bill would introduce some common-sense standards to increase transparency and accountability when a state agency considers outsourcing public work. It has passed both the House State Government and Appropriations committees.

■ **DREAM ACT 2.0** (HB 1488, Rep. Drew Hansen, D-Bainbridge Island) — This would ensure that undocumented students brought to the U.S. and Washington state as children can continue their college educations, even if President Trump succeeds in his effort to kill the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. HB 1488 would allow undocumented students who meet certain criteria to continue to qualify for the state's College Bound Scholarship program, even if DACA ends. HB 1488 previously passed the House Higher Education Committee, and this week advanced from House Appropriations.

■ **KEEP WASHINGTON WORKING** (SB 5689) — Immigrants are integral to our state's thriving economy — as workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs. By working with the Department of Commerce, labor, business and advocacy groups can develop strategies to help support them, while establishing statewide guidelines that prevent unconstitutional detention and profiling. Passed both the Senate Labor & Commerce and Ways & Means committees.

■ **RAILROAD STAFFING** (HB 1669) — To prevent devastating fatigue-caused train derailment accidents, railroad companies should have to meet minimum staffing levels, especially for trains containing hazardous materials. Passed House Labor & Workforce Standards.

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