



2016 Legislative Review

Representative
Tom Dent

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(January - April)

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Committees:

- Agriculture & Natural Resources
(Assistant Ranking Member)
- Early Learning & Human Services
(Assistant Ranking Member)
- Appropriations



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It's an honor to have the opportunity to serve our communities in the 13th District as your state representative. As a Columbia Basin resident for 60 years, I know the challenges we face in our district, and am working hard every day to address them in the Legislature.

I wanted to send this newsletter to provide a recap of my first two legislative sessions. When I was sworn into office, I hit the ground running and started establishing relationships with legislators on both sides of the aisle. Early on, I pledged to work with anyone who had the same desire as I did – to work hard and be solutions-oriented. It's easy to complain about what's wrong in our state, but in the end, that doesn't solve problems.

My legislative priorities are managing and preserving water and our natural resources, protecting private property rights, making sure our young people have every opportunity to succeed in school and life, and providing the necessary resources to law enforcement so they can be well-equipped to protect and serve. Additionally, issues related to mental health, which I discuss further in this update, have touched my heart. I didn't expect mental-health reform to become a top priority of mine, but life has a way of throwing curveballs at you.

Since being sworn into office, four bills I've introduced have been signed into law. There is still so much to do for our communities and the state, and I look forward to continuing to serve you. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any questions, comments or concerns. I'm always available to meet for coffee as well. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tom Dent

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BUDGETS

2015-17 OPERATING BUDGET

It took longer than any of us would've liked last year, but after 176 days and three special sessions, we were finally able to complete our work and adjourn. I want to provide a quick recap of the three major spending plans that were passed during the 2015 session — the operating and capital budgets, and a transportation tax package.

The \$38 billion 2015-17 operating budget passed with strong bipartisan votes in the House and Senate. The budget fully funds education, takes care of our most vulnerable citizens, and keeps our communities safe — all without any major tax increases. Because of the budget, an additional \$1.3 billion will be invested in our K-12 education system, and K-3 class sizes will be reduced.

Additionally, the spending plan provided our hardworking teachers and school employees with cost-of-living adjustments, and our college students with the first tuition reduction in more than 30 years. The budget also made major investments in early learning and mental health, which are key areas we must continue focusing on.

2016 SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING BUDGET

Thanks to the hard work done by budget negotiators, a strong supplemental operating budget proposal was ultimately agreed on by both chambers. The budget doesn't raise taxes or raid the state's rainy day fund for non-emergencies. Instead, it does what supplemental budgets should do. It makes small adjustments to the 2015-17 budget, invests in some key areas, and pays for emergencies.

CAPITAL BUDGET

The Legislature also passed a \$3.9 billion capital budget during the 2015 session, which is used to fund long-term construction needs with long-term bonds and dedicated cash accounts. Thanks to the budget, Big Bend Community College will receive funding to design a centralized state-of-the-art Professional Technical Education Center to provide flexible industry lab space for students. Central Washington University also received funding for projects and renovations. In addition, the capital budget provides funds for K-12 school construction, reduces K-3 class sizes, increases mental-health bed capacity, prioritizes housing for veterans and other vulnerable individuals, offers mitigation for the current drought, funds fire-hazard reduction efforts, and more. It's a good budget for our district and state.



MY LEGISLATION

During the 2015 legislative session, two of my bills became law, while another was designated as necessary to implement the budget (NTIB).

House Bill 1527 provides a more efficient way for pesticide licensees to become recertified. Every five years, licensees must demonstrate they meet the recertification standards to qualify for continued licensure by earning 40 recertification credits. These credits are earned by attending courses approved by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. With the passage of House Bill 1527, the WSDA may now waive the recertification requirements if the licensee demonstrates they're meeting comparable recertification standards through another state, jurisdiction, or government agency plan approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency. This is a small, but very important change to current law that will help the entire industry.

House Bill 1989, which I sponsored on behalf of the city of Quincy, allows municipalities to contract for asset management services for their water storage assets, such as water tanks, towers, wells, meters and filters. This bill provides the opportunity for municipalities like Quincy to manage their water storage assets in the best way they see fit. Not only does it provide more autonomy, but it also saves taxpayer dollars by allowing for long-term management agreements instead of simply contracting out for each individual service need.

House Bill 1526, the first bill I introduced, requires all aircraft excise tax revenue to be deposited in the aeronautics account. That was the original intent of the account, but over the years, the Legislature reallocated the funding so 10 percent went into the aeronautics account, while the rest went into the general fund. This bill makes sure the funds go back into the aeronautics account — specifically the Department of Transportation Aviation Airport Aid Grant Program. After being designated as NTIB, this bill was included in the 2015-17 operating budget. This was a big win for aviation in our state because an additional \$9.3 million will be provided for us from the FAA's airport improvement program.

During the 2016 session, two more of my bills were signed into law

House Bill 2413 removes excessive penalties for past due aircraft registrations. Currently, late payers could face a \$400 penalty on a \$65 combined annual aircraft registration and excise tax fee. That's excessive. When my bill goes into effect in June, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) will be required to levy a single \$100 penalty on individuals whose aircraft registrations are 60 days or more past due. This small change to current law is a much more reasonable approach and will be helpful to many in the aviation community. In addition to changing the penalty structure, my bill also redirects penalty revenue from the general fund to the aeronautics account.

House Bill 2925 requires the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow citizens access to public lands during a wildfire for the purposes of saving their livestock, so long as they do not interfere with an active fire response. Ranchers like myself know that good animal husbandry requires looking after the health and safety of our animals at all times, so it simply makes sense for DNR to afford citizens the opportunity to rescue their animals. Additionally, my bill creates civil liability immunity for the state if a livestock owner accesses public lands to retrieve livestock during a fire response and is injured or killed.

My philosophy when introducing a bill is the same as my philosophy when voting for or against a bill. I believe government should fulfill its most critical duties, and then let citizens prosper without interference. State government absolutely has a role to play, but that role should be limited in scope so as to give more power to individuals and less to the state.

MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

I mentioned earlier mental-health reform wasn't one of my top priorities when I first came to Olympia. However, God works in mysterious ways and brought two very special people into my life who quickly made it a priority for me. Their names are Doug and Nancy Reuter. The Reuters tragically lost their son Joel in 2013 after he suffered a manic episode, fired a handgun at police, and was killed by a police sniper.

Doug and Nancy had tried for months before that incident to have a designated mental-health professional recommend Joel be involuntarily held at a hospital for treatment. In 2013, however, Washington state was one of seven states that prevented family from petitioning a court to review a decision to not involuntarily commit a mentally-ill individual.

Fortunately, **House Bill 1258** (known as Joel's Law), was introduced last year to change that. When the bill came to the House floor for a vote, I spoke in support of it. Doug and Nancy saw my speech online and asked to meet with me to discuss additional ways I could help advocate for the bill's passage, which became law via the companion bill in the Senate, **Senate Bill 5269**. Meeting them changed my life. They helped open my eyes to our state's flawed mental-health system, and because of that meeting, I have become a passionate and dedicated advocate for mental-health reforms.

Because of Joel's Law, family members of mentally-ill individuals are now allowed to petition a court for their involuntary treatment so they can get the help they need. That is an important step forward for our state, but there is so much more we can do. My goal in serving as a state representative is to make people's lives better. If there is a piece of legislation I can sponsor or support that will save lives and make families stronger, you can be sure I will be working to see it passed into law. I want to thank Doug and Nancy Reuter for changing my life, for changing my priorities, and for working tirelessly to make sure no more parents lose a mentally-ill family member.

EARLY LEARNING

I have been a member of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee since being sworn into office. The 11-member committee considers issues relating to early learning from birth to kindergarten, as well as issues affecting children and families, including parent education, foster care, dependency, child protective services, children's mental health, child welfare services and family reconciliation services.

In August 2015, I was appointed to the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC). It has been a privilege working with my fellow members on ELAC to develop ideas and solutions to help strengthen the quality of care and early learning for children.

In January 2016, I was appointed assistant ranking member of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee. This is a special committee to me because one of my biggest passions as a legislator is helping young people who may not have had the best start in life. I am determined to continue developing and supporting policies to help them get on a path toward success.



MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

I meet with a variety of people in my office, but I especially enjoy meeting with young people who are passionate about impacting their communities in positive ways. The past two sessions, I have had the privilege of meeting with students from 4-H (Head, Heart,

Hands and Health), TAPS (Teens Against Pot Smoking), and LEAP (Latino/a Educational Achievement Project).

4-H provides youth development and mentoring programs. It was great to see the students engaged in the process of learning how state government operates.

TAPS is a program of the Kittitas County Youth Experience (KCYE) group, which is comprised of teenagers from Ellensburg dedicated to influencing their peers to abstain from smoking marijuana. I was happy to host some of the TAPS members in my office to learn about the program and discuss what I could do to help them. I am passionate about young people staying in school and away from drugs, so I am thankful to the KCYE students for their efforts.

LEAP's mission is to improve academic achievement of Latino/a students in Washington state, and to ensure all students graduate from high school with the skills, knowledge and confidence necessary for success in postsecondary education and today's workplace.

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KIDS KAUCUS

One of my top priorities as a legislator is ensuring every child in our state has an opportunity to succeed in school and in life. Unfortunately, too many children are being left behind. That's why I created the Kids Caucus, which brings together legislators and individuals from the private and public sector to come up with ideas to improve youth services in our state. There are too many homeless youth, too many who struggle with dependency, depression, and thoughts of suicide, and too many in foster care waiting for a loving place to call home. These are all very serious issues, and ones where we need to think outside the box and work together toward positive solutions. Kids Caucus continues to grow, and word is spreading around the state. One woman made the four-hour drive all the way from Tri-Cities to be in attendance at one of our meetings. If you have thoughts or ideas about how we can improve youth services, please send me an email at Tom.Dent@leg.wa.gov. I would love to hear from you.

WILDFIRE CAUCUS

Because of my 40 years of experience in aviation and aircraft-related activities, I put together a bipartisan wildfire caucus to work with the DNR on developing solutions to prevent devastating wildfires in our state. We need to come up with better ways to battle these fires. In the last two years, Washington state has spent nearly \$300 million on fire suppression efforts. I produced a comprehensive report on wildfires this

year that outlines solutions for battling these fires through better forest health, wildfire suppression, and forest rehabilitation efforts. You can read it on my legislative website at RepresentativeTomDent.com.

A major part of our problem has been the mismanagement of our forests and state lands. Any plan we come up with to combat these wildfires should include looking at ways to improve the health of our forests through insect control, as well as proper grazing and harvesting. We also need to reduce the amount of fuel on the forest floor.

Cooperation with each of the agencies involved with fighting fires must be cohesive, and a change in management tactics is necessary for this cohesion to take place. The loss we have experienced the past several years should never be forgotten, and we should do everything in our power to make sure a crisis like this never happens again.

UPCOMING TOWN HALLS

From day one, I have been dedicated to keeping you informed about the latest news from the Legislature. I have made dozens of radio appearances, sent out regular email and video updates, and also held two telephone town halls with Sen. Judy Warnick and Rep. Matt Manweller.

This interim, I am planning on hosting several town halls. My legislative assistant Marge and I are currently working on securing venues. Please contact us at (509) 766-6682 for more details.