



2016 Legislative Review

47th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Spring 2016

Representative Mark Hargrove

Keeping in Touch

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- Transportation
(Assistant Ranking Republican)
- Education
- Higher Education



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It's an honor to serve as your state representative in the People's House in Olympia. Since being sworn into office in 2011, I've been a strong advocate for improving our public education system, implementing common-sense transportation reforms, and fostering an economic climate that is friendly to employers and job creators.

Our kids and families deserve a world-class education system with great schools and the best teachers. I support funding education first in the state budget so every child, regardless of ZIP code, has an opportunity to succeed in the classroom.

As the assistant ranking member of the House Transportation Committee, I'm committed to improving our highways and reducing gridlock. We need common-sense transportation reforms to ensure commuters are spending less time in traffic and our businesses and ports can move their goods in a timely manner.

We know a strong economy is the foundation for prosperous families and communities. Yet, too many Washingtonians are still out of work, underemployed or afraid of losing their jobs. We can do better. The Legislature must remember it's the private sector, not government, that creates jobs. Keeping taxes low and eliminating unnecessary regulations will help businesses thrive and get more people back to work.

These are key issues for our district, and I look forward to continuing to work together with you to develop new and innovative solutions for each of them. If you have any comments, questions or concerns, please feel free to get in touch with me any time.

Again, it's an honor representing you in Olympia. If you see me around Kent, Auburn or Covington, please don't be shy about saying hello and talking with me about what's on your mind. We're all neighbors who want the best for our communities.

Sincerely,

Mark Hargrove

I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

As your representative in a government of the people, by the people and for the people, I hope you can see many of my legislative efforts have been the direct result of input from you, my constituents. My efforts have focused on a variety of topics because they are your ideas. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any concerns or ideas you have to improve our state. I look forward to hearing from you.

A word on the 2015 and 2016 legislative sessions

I know many of you have been frustrated by the four special sessions we've had in the past two years. After the longest string of special sessions in history in 2015, yet another special session was required earlier this year in order to finish our work. But there is actually a positive side to this.

For much of the past three decades, one party was largely in control, unchecked by the other half of the Legislature. But that changed in 2013. Now, those advocating for large tax increases have to come to the table with those who know we can fund our priorities without tax increases. It has taken some time for those who previously controlled the budget process to realize all four caucuses must be included in budget negotiations. Ever since they recognized this reality, we've had better final budget compromises that have been free of tax increases or unnecessary raiding of the state's rainy day fund.

The governor expressed his own frustration at a budget deal not being reached on time this past session in an unprecedented way – blanket vetoing 27 Senate bills. I believe this was the wrong approach, as it only served to slow down the legislative process. These 27 bills were authored by both Republicans and Democrats, and were aimed at improving the lives of Washingtonians – the disabled, the sick, community college students, and more. Fortunately, the Legislature overrode the governor's vetoes before special session adjourned.

Operating Budget

Although no operating budget is perfect, the 2015-17 spending plan passed by the Legislature serves the people of Washington state well. As a member of the House Education and Higher Education committees, I am pleased the budget invests \$1.3 billion more in K-12 education, reduces K-3 class sizes, funds teacher cost-of-living adjustments, and provides a college tuition reduction for the first time since the 1970s. Additionally, the fact there are no major tax increases in the budget is a huge win for taxpayers. No new capital gains tax or carbon tax, and no increase in the general sales tax or business and occupation tax. I was pleased to cast a 'yes' vote on the budget.

The 2016 supplemental operating budget is also a strong spending plan. It does what a supplemental budget should – makes small adjustments to the 2015-17 budget, pays for emergencies and invests in some key areas such as education and mental health.

Highlights of the supplemental budget include:

- \$40 million directed for mental-health programs and the state's two mental hospitals;
- \$29 million for overtime of home health care providers;
- As much as \$18 million for state need-grant college funding;
- \$8 million to help backfill costs to keep tuition reduced at state colleges and universities;
- \$7 million to recruit and retain K-12 staff and support for beginning teachers; and
- \$190 million in budget reserves to pay for wildfire suppression.

Capital Budget

I was also pleased with the two-year capital budget the Legislature passed during the 2015 session. The budget provides for the priorities and immediate needs of our state, and contains more than \$60 million for local projects in the 47th District, including:

Phoenix Rising – This project will provide homes for as many as 24 homeless youth. These youth will also receive behavioral support and job training.

Kent East Hill YMCA – As one of Washington's fastest-growing communities, children and families in Kent will soon have a YMCA they can attend for all sorts of recreational activities.

Covington Community Park – This \$5 million project will help add more features to the park, such as a performance stage, tennis court and picnic shelters.

SoCo Park – A shortage of neighborhood parks led to this project that will bring more park area to downtown Covington.

Soos Creek Hatchery – This hatchery has been supporting the local salmon population for more than 100 years. The \$15 million investment in the hatchery will help rebuild its water supply intake to meet federal and state criteria and keep the facilities out of the floodplain.

Transportation Package

I was unable to support last year's \$16 billion transportation package, which is currently hiking the state's gas tax by 11.9 cents. When the increases are fully implemented, our gas tax will stand at 67.8 cents per gallon (including the 18.4 cent federal gas tax), one of the highest gas taxes in the nation. With this package, the Legislature passed the largest tax increase in state history without the people having any say.

While recent lower gas prices have had the effect of hiding this tax increase, we can see the difference when we travel to other states. And after July 1 of this year, we'll certainly notice the increased driver's license and vehicle license tab fees included in the package!

Mark Hargrove

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

There are some positives, however. We will see some much-needed improvements to our transportation system, including for our highways and some local road projects in the Kent/Auburn/Covington area – widening Kent-Kangley Road over Jenkins Creek in Covington, for example. But because we didn't implement the necessary reforms to bring down the costs of our transportation projects, I believe in a few short years we will find that we are again behind in maintaining our transportation infrastructure.

As the assistant ranking member on the House Transportation Committee, I've also consistently opposed the dual HOT lane scheme on I-405 north of Bellevue, including the requirement carpoolers have Good-to-Go passes. I was pleased the governor finally asked the WSDOT to implement some changes, but the underlying flawed design philosophy needs to be addressed.

State Trooper Pay Boosted

One important element of this year's supplemental transportation budget is an increase in state trooper pay. The number of state troopers has fallen from 690 to 580 in recent years partially because of retirements, but also because we're losing them to other law enforcement agencies that can offer better pay. That's why I was glad to see broad, bipartisan support for **House Bill 2872**, which provides another 5 percent increase in pay for our state troopers for a total 15 percent bump over two years. It's very expensive to train new troopers, so the money spent on efforts to retain the ones we have actually saves the state money.

K-12 Education

The Legislature has made historic progress on school funding since 2012, allocating an additional \$4.7 billion for K-12 education – a 36 percent funding increase! Forty-eight percent of the operating budget now goes to funding K-12 education – the largest percentage in 30 years. However, in the summer of 2015, the state Supreme Court ruled the Legislature was still not adequately funding K-12 education. As a result, they fined the state \$100,000 a day.

A bipartisan, bicameral group has been working to come up with a solution to satisfy the Court's 2018 requirements as laid out in the *McCleary* case. However, it's hard to argue we haven't made great steps toward making education our paramount duty.

During the 2016 session, the Legislature passed legislation to clarify which expenses are classified as basic education, which should be paid for by the state, and which expenses local levies can pay for. This paves the way to amend our levy process and for the state to fully fund its obligations. I believe this will ensure the state is adequately funding our education system to the satisfaction of the Court.

Public Charter Schools

The other major state Supreme Court ruling in 2015 centered on voter-approved public charter schools. After a lawsuit was brought by the Washington Education Association (WEA) and other groups, the Court ruled public charter schools unconstitutional. I was dismayed for the many parents who had been relying on the public charter school system to educate their children. However, not all hope was lost. During the 2016 session, the Legislature acted to save public charter schools by passing **Senate Bill 6194**. Although we're in the minority, House Republicans took the lead on this issue and controlled floor action all the way through to the final vote. It was fascinating to experience. Acting as the majority for this one vote, Republicans actually listened to the minority – changing our minds in one instance to support an amendment they proposed that we had previously opposed. That is how our government is supposed to work – actually listening to each other, debating, and voting in a bipartisan way. I'm pleased we were able to pass the bill and once again bring hope to the students and families who thought charter schools might no longer be an option for them. The WEA, unfortunately, continues to oppose public charter schools and is planning to introduce another lawsuit in an attempt to stop them.

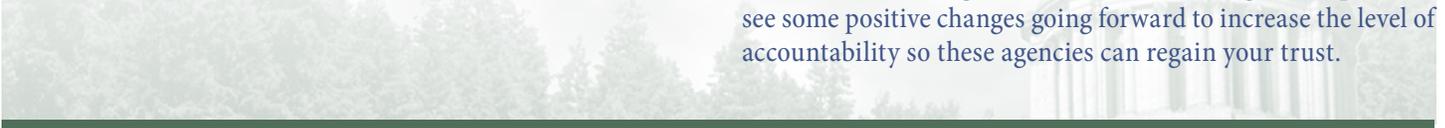
Hiring and Keeping Quality Teachers

Early in the 2016 session, I co-sponsored **House Bill 2382** with the goal of attracting high-quality teachers who might not have initially started careers as teachers. This bill, which was ultimately included in **Senate Bill 6455**, will increase alternative pathways to teacher certification. It was approved by both chambers and signed into law by the governor.

I also recognize too much focus on underperforming teachers is burdensome to the majority of teachers who do great work. That's why I supported **House Bill 1867**, which would reward teachers who had good evaluations by not requiring another burdensome evaluation for the next couple of years. It would also relieve the principal's workload of conducting all those evaluations. While it didn't pass this session, the groundwork has been laid for passage in 2017.

Agency Accountability

This year, the Secretary of the Department of Corrections resigned following the early-release scandal, the Secretary of the Department of Social and Human Services resigned, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation was fired by the Senate, and the State Auditor was absent from office as he faced a federal felony indictment. For me, these developments raise concerns about how well our government is functioning. I'm hopeful we see some positive changes going forward to increase the level of accountability so these agencies can regain your trust.



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My Bills

2015 session:

During the 2015 session, I introduced **House Bill 1800**, which would require a court to order the filing of a termination of parental rights petition when a child has been in out-of-home care for at least 12 months and the parents have had no contact. I strongly value parental rights, but when it's clear a child's birth parents have no interest in reunification, we need to more quickly enable that child to find a permanent, loving home with his or her foster or other adoptive parents. Unfortunately, after both the House and Senate passed amended versions of the bill, the House majority party killed it.

I also co-sponsored **House Bill 1219**, which expedites the permit and contracting process for repairing the state's structurally deficient bridges, while reducing costs in the process. The bill was signed into law and is now in effect.

2016 session:

Too often, when making life-changing decisions for foster children, our courts don't get valuable information from the foster parents who've been caring for these children for months or even years. That's why I introduced **House Bill 2591**. It implements necessary

accountability measures to make it much more likely courts will get this valuable input. The bill was signed into law by the governor and goes into effect in June.

Another bill I introduced during the 2016 session was **House Bill 2301**, which would reform the State Need Grant program. Many parents are unable to send their children to the University of Washington or Washington State University for four years because of the cost. As a result, they make the wise financial decision to send their student to a community college for two years, and then pay for them to finish at UW or WSU. My bill would require the state to be just as financially responsible. Instead of paying the expensive UW or WSU tuition for all four years for State Need Grant recipients, the state would pay only the community college rate for the first two years. This responsible change would mean 8,000 more students would be able to get a college degree at no additional cost to us, the taxpayers.

While I didn't get this bill passed this session, I will keep working on it because this is one of many common-sense solutions to stretch our tax dollars. There is a direct relationship between paying for State Need Grants and the price of college tuition, which I am committed to reducing even more than we did last year!