



REPRESENTATIVE

Bob McCaslin

REPORT TO THE 4TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



Keeping in Touch

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- Early Learning & Human Services
- Education
- Local Government

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

My dad always said being elected by the community – the friends, neighbors and small business owners we saw everyday – was one of the most honoring yet humbling experiences of his life. I feel the same way he did, and am proud to have the opportunity to carry on his legacy of service to the 4th District.

Since being sworn into office, I've worked hard to absorb as much information as I can and establish relationships with legislators on both sides of the aisle.

As a public school teacher for more than three decades, I know the importance of giving our children every opportunity to succeed in the classroom and in life. We must continue to work together to put them first – not because of an order from the state Supreme Court, but because it's the right thing to do.

We also must continue standing up for working families by allowing our economy to thrive, free from burdensome tax increases and unnecessary regulations. I'd like to see more discussion and effort centered on increasing the number of taxpayers rather than increasing taxes. Our existing taxpayers are a limited revenue source, so we should look at growing our taxpayer base through job creation and making Washington state more attractive to employers.

It is always a humbling process to vote on legislation that impacts the citizens of this great state, and I take that responsibility very seriously. If you look at my record, you'll see that I've been consistent in voting against legislation that unnecessarily increases the size and scope of government. I'm a firm believer in individual responsibility, personal freedom and letting the free enterprise system do what our founders intended, unimpeded by unreasonable government regulation.

My goal as a legislator has been to earn your trust through honesty, hard work and accountability. These are the qualities that come to mind when I think about our community, and they are at the forefront of the decisions I make in Olympia on your behalf.

Please feel free to contact me any time with questions, comments or ideas about how we can work together to solve the challenges facing our district and state. I am here to serve you year-round, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bob McCaslin



BUDGETS

Operating Budget

The \$38 billion two-year operating budget the Legislature passed last year was a big improvement over the proposals offered earlier in the session. Even so, while the budget includes funding for many important programs and services, it has its problems.

First, the good. The budget is free of any major tax increases, which is a big win considering the majority party in the House had \$1.5 billion in new taxes on the table early on in the session. The budget also invests \$1.3 billion toward meeting our constitutional obligation to fund K-12 basic education. Additionally, college students will see a reduction in their tuition for the first time since the 1970s.

The bad is the budget represents a 12 percent increase in spending from the previous operating budget. With state revenue projected to increase about 9 percent, we are still spending beyond our means and setting ourselves up for more budget gridlock in the future. The budget also relies too heavily on tax shifts and transfers of funds from public works and other dedicated accounts. Moreover, it leaves a very small ending fund balance to address unforeseen costs and emergencies.

Finally, the budget continues state funding of Planned Parenthood. This is unacceptable.

You sent me to Olympia to protect human life, support fiscally responsible policies, and ensure our state government is working for us, not against us. I am committed to doing that, which is why I voted “no” on the 2015-17 operating budget.



2016 Supplemental Operating Budget

I voted “no” on the supplemental operating budget that passed this year because it, too, is unsustainable. We’re spending more than \$1 billion every year just to service our debt, so we must begin to take a more serious look at reducing state spending. While the supplemental operating budget is free of new taxes, it was passed using tactics like fund sweeps and transfers.

Additionally, we are now spending more than 48 percent of the operating budget on public education, an historic high, but several problems exist:

- 1) We are not allocating funds to attract new teachers by raising starting pay to address our teacher shortage.
- 2) The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction can spend as much as 45 cents of every dollar just to implement the things we want schools to do.
- 3) We have a testing system in our state that takes students out of the classroom for as many as three weeks to prepare them just to take the tests.
- 4) While I know our local school districts in Spokane Valley are doing great work, our state’s high school graduation rate is only 77 percent. This is unacceptable, and we need to make sure our tax dollars are being used to increase the number of graduates..

In addition to funding education, we’re also paying for wildfire costs in the budget. That is important, but we need to be more focused on prevention going forward. I’m not seeing as much movement as I’d like in this area.

One area the Legislature has done a nice job improving the past two years is the state’s mental-health infrastructure. That’s encouraging to me because we have lagged behind most other states on this critical issue. The Legislature has passed a variety of good bills and allocated tens of millions of dollars to improve our mental-health system, so I am hopeful these dollars will be effective in getting people the help they need.



Capital Budget

I supported the 2015-17 capital budget, which is known as the “bricks and mortar” budget because it funds the physical infrastructure needs of the state. This includes funding for prisons, K-12 and higher education facilities, water management, public land purchases, public housing and park facilities. The \$3.9 billion capital budget we passed last year builds more than 500 new K-12 classrooms, funds construction and maintenance projects for schools, makes the largest-ever investment in state parks and trails, and more. It is a very strong bipartisan budget.

Locally, the budget funds a number of important projects in our community, including the completion of the final phase of the Spokane Valley Tech addition, improvements to Mount Spokane State Park, funds for the Appleway Trail development, and more.

Transportation Package

The other major vote we took last year was on a \$16 billion transportation package, which I voted “no” on. This package includes some important projects, but also raises the state’s gas tax by 11.9 cents. I sent out a survey last session to ask if you would be willing to pay more at the pump if more transportation projects were funded in the 4th District, and a whopping 82 percent of you said “no.”

Along with the large increase in the gas tax, weight and registration fee hikes were also included in the package. And while there were several Department of Transportation reforms included, I felt they could’ve been much stronger. They certainly weren’t strong enough to justify such large increases in the gas tax and weight and registration fees.



EDUCATION

Last summer, the state Supreme Court imposed a \$100,000 a day fine on the state because it ruled the Legislature had not adequately funded K-12 education during the 2015 legislation session. This, despite the fact we added \$1.3 billion in education funding and spent nearly half of all operating dollars – 48 percent – on K-12 education. The *McCleary* court decision remains a challenge, but I continue to fully support efforts to fund education first in our state budget. If education is truly the state’s paramount duty, then we should treat it as such while also demanding accountability and improved academic performance.

Charter Schools

The other controversial ruling from the state Supreme Court last year was a 6-3 vote that rendered voter-approved charter schools unconstitutional. I was dismayed by the court’s ruling because the public charter school system we have in place has been growing and educating more and more children each year. Not only have these schools proved to be a popular alternative for parents, but we’ve also seen many success stories. Not every student does well in the current public school model, so if charter schools are a better fit for some children, we should support them – not try to eliminate them. That’s why I was so pleased to cast a vote earlier this session in favor of Senate Bill 6194, which keeps public charter schools open in Washington state. To be able to bring these students and their families hope once again is a wonderful feeling.

A Word About Test Scores

One of the more controversial education bills introduced last year was Senate Bill 5748, which would’ve required student scores on statewide standardized tests to play a role in teacher and principal evaluations. The



problem is a bad test score does not necessarily indicate that a teacher is failing in the classroom. There are a variety of factors, both for students and teachers, that should be taken into account when reviewing performance. Some students

will struggle despite teachers’ best efforts because of an unstable environment at home or a number of other circumstances. The bottom line is since test scores don’t fully measure the hard work and effort put in by teachers and students, we should stop introducing legislation that puts even more of an emphasis on them.

On a broader policy note, I strongly disagree with the approach of teaching to the test. For most students, their favorite teachers aren’t the ones who simply open a textbook and teach them what to memorize – and then immediately forget afterward – for a test. Instead, their favorite teachers are the ones who inspire them and encourage them to pursue their passions and become excited about learning new material. There is no question there should be accountability for teachers when it comes to how their students are performing, but we need to make sure the legislation we pass does more to help than hurt.



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LEGISLATION I'VE INTRODUCED AND SUPPORTED

Last session, I sponsored **House Bill 1610** to decrease the period of time for jury terms and juror service in certain counties, while excusing those who have already served at least one week of juror service in the last 12 months. This bill was signed into law by the governor, and is helping to increase jury service participation while ensuring we're not putting an undue burden on jurors and their families.

This session, I introduced **House Bill 2519** to allow cities to recover a portion of the funds they're spending cleaning up abandoned properties. When it goes into effect in June, cities will be able to recover as much as \$2,000 of the costs incurred while removing nuisances (trash, abandoned furniture, rodent infestations, etc.)

that threaten public health or safety. Some cities are spending tens of thousands of dollars on nuisance abatement each year. It's important they have the ability to recover a portion of these funds so they can be allocated for other critical government services.

Another bill I sponsored was **House Bill 2526**. It would change, from 90 days to 30 days, the amount of time a person must maintain a permanent place of residence within Washington state in order to obtain a hunting or fishing license. It passed the House 98-0, but did not come up for a vote in the Senate.

I also worked hard with Rep. Steve Bergquist, D-Renton, on **House Bill 1867**, which concerns the frequency of evaluations for certain teachers. This bill would have put a greater emphasis on assessing new and struggling teachers, and reduced the time spent on evaluating good teachers who are consistently doing their jobs well. The bill passed the House 96-0, and I testified on it when it received a public hearing in the Senate. Unfortunately, it also did not come up for a vote in the Senate.