

JT. WILCOX Graham HUNT

2ND DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The state Legislature adjourned on time March 13, without a special session. We are pleased to report that we left Olympia with a balanced budget and none of the major tax hikes that had been proposed.

Because this was a short, 60-day session, we only made minor changes to the operating and transportation budgets. We also passed a number of bills – helping veterans and improving state agency customer service, for example – that will benefit people in the 2nd District.

Finally, you'll notice a new addition to your legislative team: Rep. Graham Hunt replaces our good friend Rep. Gary Alexander, who stepped down late last year after many years of service. Rep. Hunt was appointed to the state House in January by the Thurston County Commission and Pierce County Council. You can read more about Rep. Hunt inside.

Sincerely,

JT Wilcox
State Representative

Graham Hunt
State Representative

STATE BUDGET STILL BALANCED

At the beginning of session, the governor proposed a \$200 million tax and spending increase that would have blown a hole in the larger balanced budget we passed last year. Fortunately, that plan never came to a vote.

The “supplemental” operating budget we approved this year included new revenues that came into the state from the slowly recovering economy. Almost two-thirds of new policy spending went to K-12 and higher education. The rest was directed to mental health, care for people with developmental disabilities, long-term care, criminal justice and other government operations.

TOLL-FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:
(800) 562-6000

TTY (HARD OF HEARING):
(800) 635-9993

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION:
www.leg.wa.gov

Representative **GRAHAM HUNT**



Rep. Graham Hunt with Medal of Honor recipient U.S. Army Capt. William Swenson of Seattle. Capt. Swenson was awarded the highest military honor for his bravery and sacrifice in the Battle of Ganjgal, Kunar Province, Afghanistan. Read more about him at: <http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/swenson>

Giving back to our veterans who have sacrificed for us

As a 10-year combat veteran who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, I know the uncertainty and challenges our soldiers face, both when they are deployed, and when they return home to civilian life. That's why I am proud to report on several important bills recently signed into law that will help our veterans.

Veteran-owned businesses - House Bill 2744 is a measure I authored that creates a certified list of veteran-owned businesses in Washington which consumers can patronize and support. The list is maintained by the state Department of Veterans Affairs. Businesses will also be able to receive a decal they can post in their storefronts so they can be quickly identified by consumers as veteran-owned. This measure will help to create jobs that support veterans.

Financial and legal protections - House Bill 2171 provides various protections for military service members ordered to federal active duty. Examples include: reduced interest rates on preexisting debts, foreclosure and eviction protections, and protections from default judgments. These protections allow members of the Armed Forces to focus their full attention on their military responsibilities without adverse consequence for themselves or their families.

Higher education for veterans - Senate Bill 5969 awards academic credit to individuals for certain military training courses or programs by 2016. Senate Bill 5318 ensures veterans have affordable, hassle-free and immediate access to Washington colleges and universities upon leaving service, and waives the one-year residency requirement for in-state tuition.

Privacy protection of mental health records

In the House Appropriations Committee, I offered four amendments to Senate Bill 6312 to help protect patient privacy. The bill relates to the state providing mental and chemical health services. My intent was to require old records to be disposed of, protecting data, and keeping third-party access limited.

Only one of the amendments was accepted. However, it is an important change to the bill which prohibits the Department of Social and Health Services and the Health Care Authority from releasing any public reports of client outcomes unless identifying information is removed that would protect client identities. The bill, with the amendment included, passed the Legislature and was signed into law.



Daniel Harralson, an 8th grade student at Liberty Middle School in Puyallup, served as Rep. Hunt's legislative page. Daniel's duties included delivering messages and bills to lawmakers' offices and to the House floor. Pages also spent time in the Legislative Page School learning about state government. Daniel is the 14-year-old son of Philip Harralson of Puyallup.

For more information about the page program, go to: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/House/Pages/HousePageProgram.aspx>

Representative J. T. WILCOX

Bills of interest

Two of my bills have been signed into law. The first streamlines permitting for fish barrier removal projects, and the second clarifies that nurseries can keep their farm and agricultural land-use classification whether they grow their crops in pots or in the ground.

Another bill, also signed into law, will speed up the process for business owners to get state agency permits approved. This will help employers grow and, hopefully, hire workers more quickly.

Privacy

At our 2nd District town hall meetings in February, many of you voiced concerns about threats to privacy.

One area where we made progress this session was with the government use of drones. We crafted a truly bipartisan bill that restricted how government could deploy drones, and what it could do with information gathered.

Unfortunately, Gov. Inslee vetoed the bill. But I suspect we will take up this issue again next year.



In the Appropriations and Finance committees, Rep. Wilcox advocates for more responsible budget and tax policy.



Rep. Wilcox speaks at rally protesting 95 percent tax on personal vaporizers.

Government overreach

I was struck this session by several examples of attempted government overreach into people's lives. Two examples:

The majority party introduced a bill that would have required employers to disclose confidential financial information. One woman who testified against the bill said more people didn't come to Olympia to testify because they were afraid of government retaliation.

Another bill would have imposed a 95 percent tax on personal vaporizing devices, which are an alternative to cigarettes. Many people came to testify against the bill, saying switching from cigarettes to "vaping" had dramatically improved their health.

In both cases, elected officials were trying to use the power of the government to target a specific group of people. To me, it smacked of bullying and a fundamental lack of fairness.

I will continue to keep an eye out for examples of government overreach – and I hope you will, too.

Representatives
J. T. WILCOX
GRAHAM HUNT

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NO GAS TAX HIKE

As stories mount of mistakes and cost overruns at the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT), it is clear we must have reforms before even considering a gas tax increase.

You've probably heard of the problems on the 520 bridge and State Route 99 tunnel projects in the Seattle area. WSDOT can barely manage these two mega-projects, so why would we give the agency more of your tax dollars?

Any increase in the gas tax – let alone the 11.5 cent per-gallon hike the governor is pushing – is out of the question until WSDOT proves it has implemented reforms and is being a better steward of your money.

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

We keep hearing from economists that the recession is over. But for people outside the greater Seattle area, unemployment and underemployment are still a big problem.

Last November, the Legislature held a special session to approve tax exemptions for the aerospace industry, in particular Boeing's new 777x plane. That was a good thing to do because it meant thousands of jobs would stay in our state.

Unfortunately, very little has been done to extend more jobs-friendly incentives to other industries and other parts of Washington. We must address this imbalance in order to improve our state's jobs climate for everyone.

