



City of Spokane

Legislative Update



January 25, 2008

Dear Friends,

The Washington State Legislature convened for its 2008 session on January 14th. This is a “short” legislative session, lasting only 60 days. All bills must advance from the committee of origin by February 8th, the house of origin by February 19th, and the opposite house committee by February 29th. The last day to consider bills from the opposite house is March 7th. For a short session, we are amazed at the volume of bills being introduced and the pace with which some are moving through the process.

Last week Mayor Mary Verner, Council President Joe Shogan, and Council Members Al French, Nancy McLaughlin, Bob Apple and Richard Rush were among 80 business and civic leaders who visited Olympia. The annual “fly-in” was led by Greater Spokane Incorporated, the Greater Spokane Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the West Plains Chamber of Commerce. The group delivered its “One Region. One Voice” message to legislative leaders, legislators and the Governor and her staff.

Issues to Watch This Session

Budget

Governor Gregoire’s 2008 Supplemental Budget proposal includes \$144 million in additional spending to go along with the \$33 billion budget passed last year. While the governor trumpeted her budget as being fiscally responsible, the House and Senate Republicans painted a different picture by referencing the projected deficit and unfunded projects such as paid family leave, which was established last year without a funding source. Very little money will be spent this session, but some inevitably will.

Environment

Global climate issues are receiving lots of attention during this session. Environmental groups are backing a 4-bill package aimed at supporting the governor’s executive order to reduce greenhouse gases and create “green collar” jobs. A number of bills have been introduced that aim to create a “foundation” for future attempts to regulate and reduce greenhouse gases. A broad coalition of environmental groups and major business players including Weyerhaeuser, Alcoa and Boeing, endorsed the governor’s efforts, but everyone will monitor various bills because of potential far-reaching policy and cost implications.

Housing

Governor Gregoire has proposed \$50 million in additional funding for the Housing Trust Fund to be dedicated to low-income housing assistance, earmarking some for flood victims in southwest Washington. The Washington Realtors are proposing legislation that would clarify the Growth Management Act, allowing additional housing units to meet increasing demand and provide more choices for middle and lower income families. Meanwhile, House Speaker Frank Chopp wants to use public financing to help spur nonprofit organizations' development of housing projects that reduce rents and stabilize prices for houses and apartments.

Health Care

Both the House and Senate jumped right back into the health care fray, reviving bills from last year that didn't make it into law, and at the same time introducing new ones. Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler provided legislators the results of his study about costs associated with the health care system. In 2006, \$33 billion dollars was spent on health care with 30% spent on administrative costs. He recommends the creation of a central agency or group to handle efficiency issues, but did not know how much money the state could save by doing so. Needless to say, health care is "teeing up" controversial subjects, such as universal health care, for the 2009 session.

Sports Arenas

What is a legislative session with a funding request for some sports arena some where? It appears the legislature will not help the Seattle Super Sonics build a new basketball arena, but Sen. Margarita Prentice, Ways and Means Committee Chair, said that this year's athletic attraction is a University of Washington football stadium.

Presidential Primary – February 19, 2008

The Presidential primary is February 19th, and ballots are expected to be in the mail by Feb. 1st. Both the Republican and Democratic caucuses will be held around the state on Feb. 9th. For caucus locations for your participation, please see:

Spokane County Republicans: <http://spokanegop.com/>

Spokane County Democrats: <http://www.spokanedemocrats.org/>

We will keep you posted.

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