



WASHINGTON STATE SENATOR • 12TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Senator Linda Evans Parlette



2015 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

October 2015

Greetings,

The Legislature has wrapped up its work for the year. We were in session for much longer than expected: a record 176 days from mid-January to mid-July. The results were positive, however, for students, families and employers across our state.

For the third straight year our bipartisan Majority Coalition Caucus led the way to a balanced state budget that addresses the needs of Washingtonians without requiring general tax increases. The new budget features an unprecedented level of support for education, led by the college tuition reduction our Senate majority first proposed. The Legislature approved new investments in trails and state parks and other recreational assets, as well as habitat restoration. We also reached bipartisan agreement on a new package of projects to make our highways better and safer, coupled with reforms to stretch transportation dollars further.

Much of my time at the Capitol was devoted to participating in budget negotiations and other high-level discussions that go with being chair of the Senate majority. I also succeeded in addressing several issues important to north central Washington, either through new laws or budget allocations. Please keep reading for the details.

While we accomplished many important things, they seem insignificant considering the terrible wildfires that have destroyed homes and livelihoods throughout our part of the state in the weeks since I got home. We are all saddened that three young firefighters were lost and a fourth is fighting for his life due to severe burns, and pray for the recovery of all those harmed while trying to protect people and property.

I represent you as your state senator even when we are not at the Capitol. I welcome your questions and comments and hope you won't hesitate to contact me using the information on this page.

With warm regards,

Let's Stay Connected!

Now that I am back home in Wenatchee there are several ways we can stay connected. In addition to the options below you may contact me anytime via email at Linda.Parlette@leg.wa.gov or by phone at my Olympia office at (360) 786-7622.

The office is staffed by my executive assistant, Grace Edwards, and my legislative assistant, Jimmy Martin.

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Majority Coalition Caucus Chair

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES:

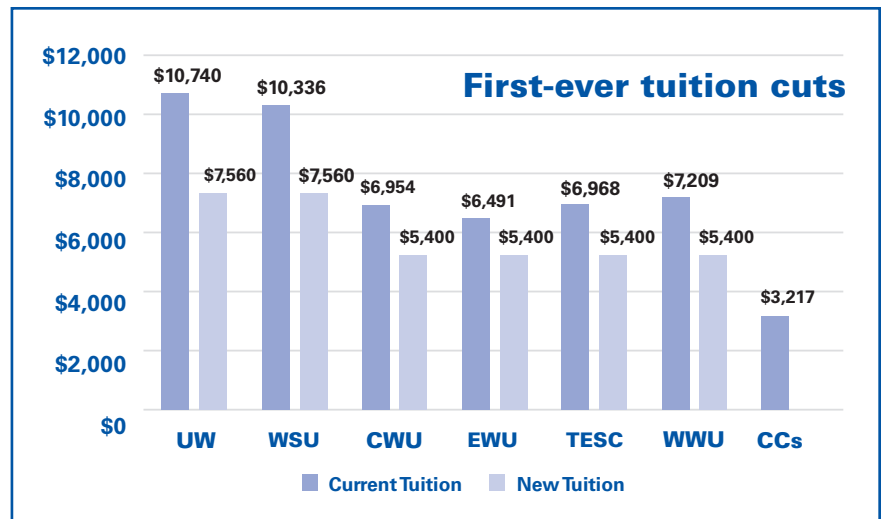
- Health Care
- Ways and Means (budget)
- Rules

No new taxes needed to balance new state budget

The priority for our 2015 session was to agree on a new budget to fund the next two years of state-government operations (services and programs, such as education). Highlights of the new operating budget include:

- A record level of support for K-12 education
- The first cut in college tuition in state history (at state-run colleges and universities)
- More support for mental-health evaluation and treatment
- More senior citizens and disabled residents are eligible for property-tax relief
- Increased funding for services to Washington's developmentally disabled community

This year leaders of the majority in the House of Representatives wanted new taxes (such as a tax on income from selling investments) to enable even more spending. Our Senate majority saw no need for new taxes, however, because Washington's economy has



been steadily improving, and generating more revenue through existing tax rates.

Since our bipartisan coalition began leading the Senate in 2013 we have focused on keeping state-government spending within the amount of revenue available. While that priority meant a longer-than-usual legislative session this year, we know stable tax rates are good for Washington families and employers and can only help our state's economy continue its recovery.

Package of new highway investments is first since 2005

Our final day at the Capitol brought the passage of the final bill in a transportation reform-and-revenue package that will fund and complete local highway projects across Washington. On top of supporting new roads across the state, it dedicates \$1.5 billion to repairs and maintenance of existing roads while unlocking some 200,000 construction jobs.

A gas-tax increase phased in over two years is the primary revenue source for this package of projects. While no one wants to pay more at the pump, it has been 10 years since lawmakers approved a change in the gas tax - which is still the most stable source of funding for the costly job of building, repairing and maintaining roads. More importantly, our Senate majority insisted on several reforms that

are intended to increase accountability for project management and stretch taxpayer dollars even further.

For people in our part of the state, the improvements this package will make to Interstate 90 through Snoqualmie Pass are as important as any local projects. The same is true for the improvements it funds for the I-90 junction with State Route 18 (the Auburn cutoff, west to Interstate 5). Also, there is funding to take down the Department of Transportation building in Wenatchee (on Wenatchee Avenue) and rebuild it elsewhere. This long-needed move will make space available for economic development.

Senate majority leads way to historic support for education

Until a few years ago the level of state spending on non-education services and programs was growing faster than the level of spending on our public schools (see chart below). This had been the case for decades, even though Washington’s constitution clearly states the Legislature’s number-one duty is to provide for basic education. Our bipartisan coalition has turned that around. Spending on education overall is up by 19% in the new budget, compared to a 6% rise in non-education spending.

Historic support for public schools: Support for K-12 education accounts for more than 47% of the new operating budget – a record \$18.2 billion. A share that large has not been seen in at least 30 years.

- We directed \$1.3 billion specifically toward K-3 class-size reduction, all-day kindergarten, and fully funding the maintenance, supplies, and operating costs of our school districts. This is a strong response to the state Supreme Court’s ruling in the *McCleary* education-funding case from 2012.
- Also, teachers will get their voter-approved 3% cost-of-living pay increase plus another 1.8% pay increase in the next two years.

Lower tuition improves access to college, reduces student debt: Our Senate majority initiated the tuition freeze at state-run colleges and universities these past

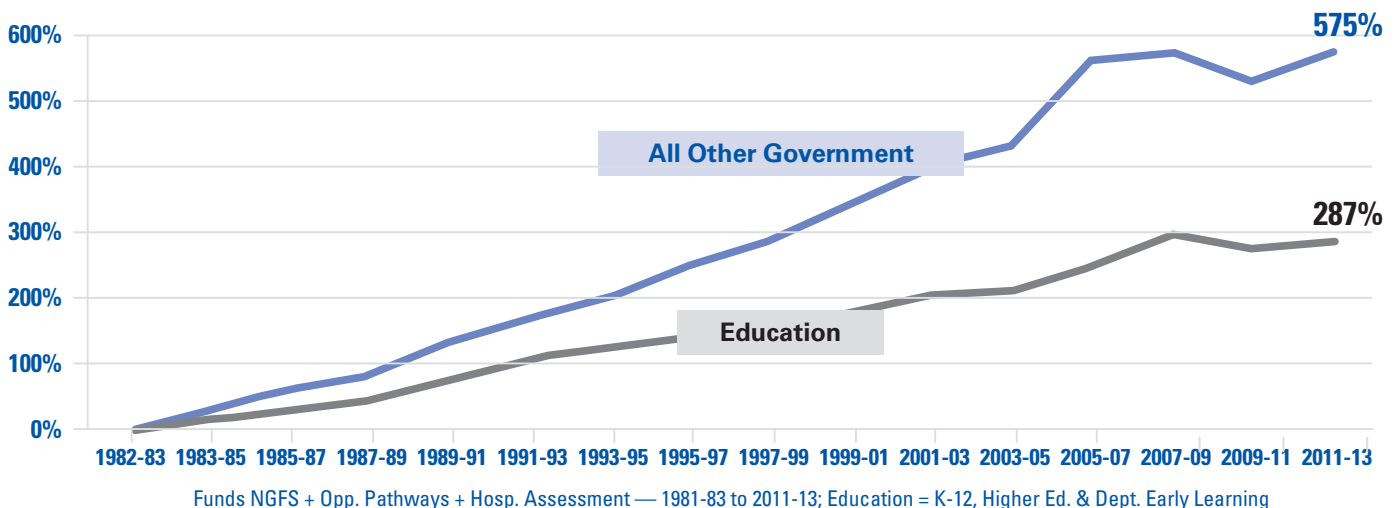
two years. This year we went farther by leading the way to the first tuition cut in state history.

- Under our “College Affordability Program” legislation all students will see a 5% tuition cut across the board for 2015-16. A larger reduction follows at four-year institutions for 2016-17, saving many students more than \$2,000 overall.
- Besides reducing tuition for the first time in state history (also the lone tuition cut approved in the nation this year) the new law also caps the rate of future tuition growth by tying it to a percentage of the state’s median wage.

My legislation to preserve and increase access to education, health care, recreation

- **Stehekin school can stay:** State law used to require a school district to dissolve if its K-8 enrollment dropped below five students. Not any more — now K-8 enrollment must be lower than five for *three consecutive years* before a district may be dissolved. I proposed that change (Senate Bill 5120) to protect access to education for Stehekin families; enrollment at the one-room Stehekin School was under five this year, but has a history of being over five in most years.

Until 2013, funding for education was a lower priority



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- **Health-care breakthroughs:** As a registered pharmacist I am concerned about access to health care. Three health-care policies I proposed this year became law; two are examples of “model” legislation that other states may consider.
 - ▶ The law created by Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5557 makes Washington the first state to grant “provider” status to pharmacists, from a health-plan standpoint. This allows pharmacists to take a more active role in caring for patients – particularly when it comes to medication management for chronic illnesses.
 - ▶ Biologics (such as new treatments for rheumatoid arthritis) are an emerging part of medicine. The law created by Engrossed Senate Bill 5935 (one of the more complex pieces of policy I have worked on in 19 years as a legislator) makes Washington a leader in creating a pathway for the interchangeability of biologics.
 - ▶ The approval of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5460 formally allows health-care practitioners to prescribe and distribute prepackaged emergency medications to emergency-room patients, when pharmacy services are not available within 15 miles of the hospital – or if the patient has no reasonable ability to reach a pharmacy. Those scenarios are not uncommon in our part of Washington.
- **“No Child Left Inside” to continue:** In 2014 the governor appointed me to his Blue Ribbon Task Force on Parks and Outdoor Recreation. This year I sponsored Senate Bill 5843 (*see photo*) to carry out some of our task-force recommendations. One is the appointment of a state outdoor-recreation leader to ensure that state agencies work together to maximize the many indirect economic benefits of recreation (outdoor recreation contributes an estimated \$22.5 billion to the Washington economy each year, according to the Outdoor Industry Association). Another is to renew the “No Child Left Inside” program I helped establish through legislation in 2008. It will focus on promoting outdoor recreation among young people, especially those who are economically disadvantaged or struggling academically.



Talking with Governor Inslee following the mid-May signing of legislation I sponsored to renew the “No Child Left Inside” program; as outdoor recreation is so important to our region’s economy, the law also creates the position of state outdoor-recreation chief within the governor’s office.

WSU authorized to open medical school

This year we agreed that Washington State University should open the state's second medical school, in Spokane. This meant repealing the 1917 law giving the University of Washington the exclusive right to operate a publicly supported medical school.

The UW School of Medicine has enrollment slots for barely one-third of the 350 Washington students who go on to medical school each year. The remainder leave the state to study, and research indicates the majority of them will never come back here to

practice. I believe a WSU medical school in Spokane will produce graduates who will do their residencies and eventually practice in smaller communities around Washington, especially east of the Cascades. This will help alleviate the physician shortage that is acute in rural areas.

The Senate has voted to name the new medical school in honor of Dr. Elson Floyd, who was WSU president from 2007 until his untimely death in June – a tremendous loss for our state.

Legislature backs capital investments in north central Washington

Our communities have needs beyond transportation projects and the services and programs funded in the state operating budget. The capital budget is a way to focus state resources on those areas.

Several allocations in the new capital budget stand out, starting with \$26 million for drought relief and forest health (plus another \$138 million for water and flood relief). Within our legislative district, there is \$400,000 for upgrades to the 911/emergency-communications system for Okanogan and Ferry counties; when combined with the \$1.85 million I secured in the 2015-17 operating budget, it means \$2.25 million is available to resolve issues stemming from the historic Carlton Complex wildfire of 2014.

As co-chair of the legislative Behavioral Health Task Force I helped arrange a \$32 million appropriation for mental-health, drug- and alcohol-treatment beds. Four facilities were selected for funding in consultation with regional support networks around Washington. One is the Parkside facility in Wenatchee; a portion will be converted to behavioral-health beds at a cost of \$3 million.

Other investments coming to our region include:

- Entiat Valley Community Services Resource Center – \$100,000
- Brewster reservoir replacement – \$1.25 million
- City of Pateros water system – \$1.838 million
- Twisp Civic Building -- \$500,000

- Revitalization of historic Wells House for community use – \$26,000
- Environmental cleanup, former Headwaters Inn gas station, Lake Wenatchee – \$300,000
- Cleanup at Kings Pacific Pride fuel depot, Twisp – \$250,000
- Sun Lakes State Park: upgrade failing water-supply systems, renovate Dry Falls Campground – \$1.15 million
- Steamboat Rock State Park: build Dunes Campground (\$3.5 million) and replace part of sewage system (\$1.229 million)
- Twisp community trail – \$200,000
- Lake Chelan State Park moorage dock pile replacement – \$248,000
- Lake Rufus Woods Fishing Access – \$2 million
- Saddle Rock Gateway and Outdoor Education Area, Wenatchee – \$481,000
- Mid Columbia – Grand Coulee habitat acquisition – \$2.82 million
- Twisp tennis court development – \$34,025
- Hale Park development, Wenatchee – \$523,000
- Cashmere Riverside Park revitalization – \$250,000
- Wenatchee Valley College (repairs and preservation work) – \$690,000

Overall, the new bipartisan capital budget blends money for more school classrooms with support for parks and trails and tens of millions of dollars for local-government infrastructure projects.



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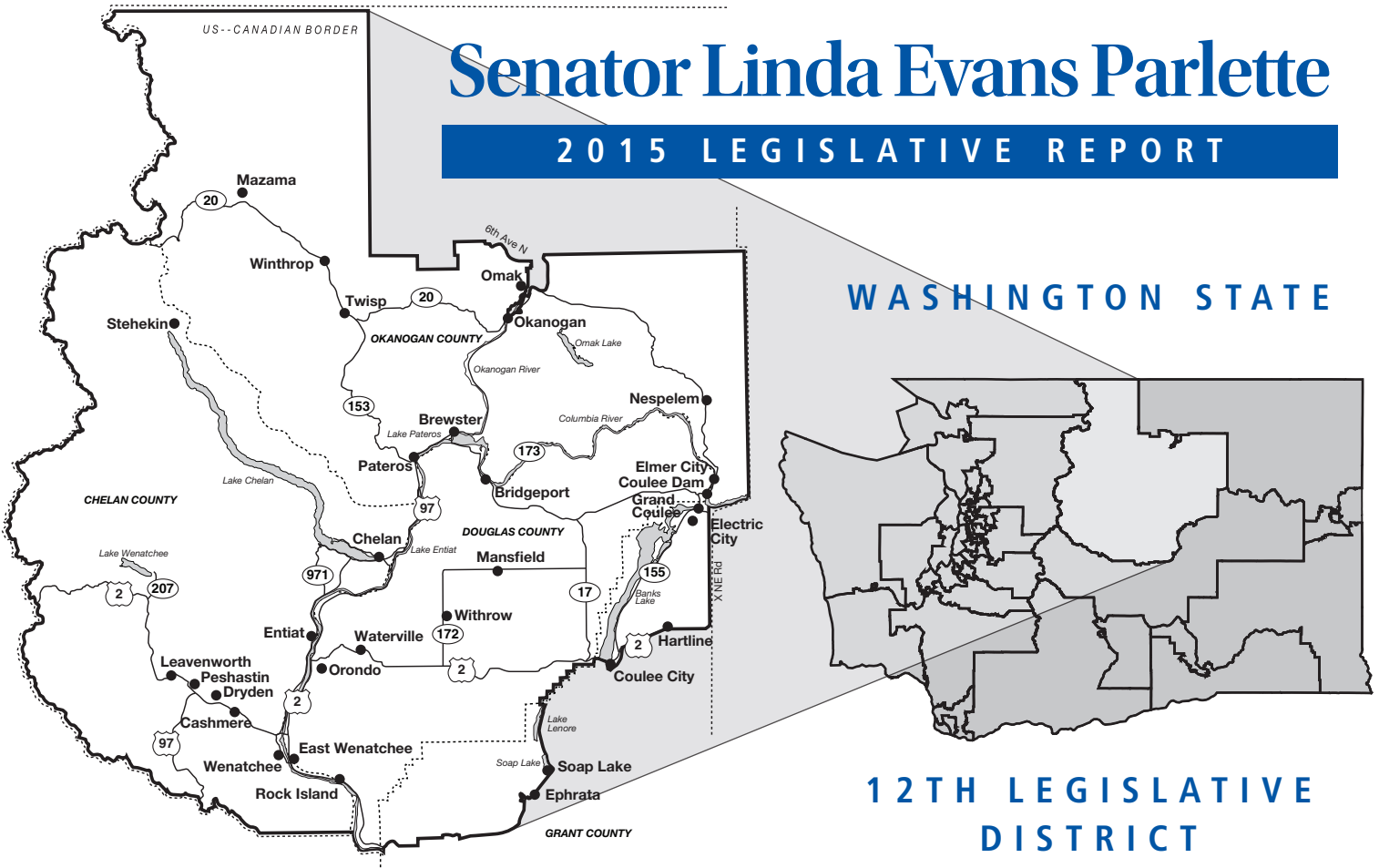
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