



# LegisLetter

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**January 18, 2008**

The 61<sup>st</sup> Washington State Legislature convened on January 14, and we wanted to share the enclosed legislative information with you.

## **Legislative Session Week 1**

The 2008 session is underway. With large majorities in the House and Senate and a tight gubernatorial race anticipated between Governor Gregoire and Dino Rossi, the expectation was for a quiet, fiscally-responsible session.

Half right.

The Governor's supplemental budget, as expected, was miniscule. While Democrats praised the Governor's fiscal restraint in light of expected decreases in revenue, Republicans pointed to the more than 30 percent plus budget increases in previous years and said that you can't make up for three years of excesses with one year of fiscal restraint.

A work session and public hearings were held on the Governor's supplemental budget. Farm Bureau requested funding for the Field of Dreams scholarship program (HB 2082, guaranteed tuition credits for students who work on farms), but it was not forthcoming.

Work has begun on the budgets for both chambers. Also looming on the tax and fiscal side was Initiative 960, which will require lawmakers to identify and approve tax and fee increases, of which, each session, there are many. Lawmakers are wrestling to identify all of the tax and fee increase bills, precisely as the initiative directs. As of this week, there has not been an articulated strategy to deal with the issue, but it's safe to assume it will not be the one envisioned by initiative guru Tim Eyman.

The first significant action of the session was in the labor and employment area. Last year the Legislature passed an ill-conceived paid family leave proposal. The bill lacked a funding source and had many technical problems. We were disappointed that the Governor signed it into law. A workgroup recommended the program be funded from the general fund, a prospect that most insiders knew would be unacceptable given the Governor's fiscal austerity (as already noted).

The solution is the Olympia version of kick the can: wait until after the 2008 elections to decide a funding source for this program, which is set to provide benefits starting October 1, 2009. In the meantime, start-up money is being "borrowed" from workers' comp trust funds, and a technical fix bill will provide an opportunity for Farm Bureau and other business groups to fix some of the many problems with the new law. A hearing on the technical fix bill was held Friday afternoon in the House.

In other labor news, a work session will be held next week in the House Commerce and Labor Committee on the session's biggest labor and employment bill, the so-called "union gag bill." (Legislation has not been introduced, but last year's bill was HB 2383). This legislation would prohibit employers from discussing a number of topics with employees, including the subject of labor unions or union organizing, unless the employee had given prior permission to the employer. Much like the paid leave bill last year, this is one that promises to go down to the wire.

One additional area to watch this session is climate change. Right out of the gate this week, both the House and Senate held work sessions and hearings on legislation dealing with the subject of climate change. Next week, Governor-request legislation and additional bills on the subject will be heard. Clearly there will be great effort spent to deal with the human impacts on our climate. Unfortunately, the scientific debate on this subject has been silenced in favor of political science. Solid scientific evidence indicates that while the earth has experienced climate change since it was created, the real impact of humans on this long-term cycle is still open for discussion. Farm Bureau will join with other organizations to seek actions that will be economically sustainable, have a demonstrable impact on our climate, and be prudent regardless of whether or not climate change has any impact.

Our key concern is ensuring that water supplies will be available to agriculture so that it can continue doing the job of providing the food, fiber, and fuel for our nation. We are asking the legislature to increase efforts to find new water supplies and eliminate disincentives to the efficient use of water.

**Flooding to Receive Legislative Attention:** The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing Monday on three bills aimed at mitigating the affects of flooding. HB 2525 would exempt from certain permit requirements any work to mitigate flood damage in areas where the Governor has declared a state of emergency. HB 2628 would establish model bank stabilization projects, while HB 2677 would allow a county, flood control district or diking district to remove gravel for the purpose of flood control.

Farm Bureau supports these bills and will advocate their passage. Farm Bureau will also advocate the passage of SB 5733 and HB 1748, introduced in 2007 to address chronic dangers from consecutive years of threats or damage from flooding or erosion.

In addition to policy legislation, Farm Bureau is working with legislative and executive offices to identify funding gaps that must be addressed to fully utilize state, federal and local resources to remove large woody debris and up to four feet of river silt and to otherwise help farms recover from the recent flooding and wind storms that impacted several counties.

**Legislative Days:** Our annual Leg Days event is February 5-6. A registration form and tentative agenda are posted online at [www.wsfb.com](http://www.wsfb.com) for your convenience. To register, simply fill out the form and fax or mail it back with your \$50 registration payment. Contact Shannon at [sgarland@wsfb.com](mailto:sgarland@wsfb.com) or (800) 331-3276 with any questions. Also, for room reservations, please contact the Olympia Red Lion Hotel at (360) 943-4000 and tell them you're with Farm Bureau.

**Public Policy Agenda:** Each year Washington Farm Bureau publishes a Public Policy Agenda that provides an overview of its public policy goals. To view a copy of this publication so you will know what we will be working to achieve this year, visit [www.wsfb.com](http://www.wsfb.com).

**LegisLetter:** For up-to-date information on how the actions of the Legislature will affect farmers and ranchers, LegisLetter is your source. LegisLetter is published and delivered by email each week during the legislative session. If you have not yet signed up and would like to receive it, please send an email to Shannon at [sgarland@wsfb.com](mailto:sgarland@wsfb.com) and ask to be added to the list.

## **INFORMATION RESOURCES**

**Washington Farm Bureau:** [www.wsfb.com](http://www.wsfb.com)

**Legislative Information:** [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)

**Governor's Bill Actions:** [www.governor.wa.gov](http://www.governor.wa.gov)

**Legislative Hotline:** (800) 562-6000

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