



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

March 21, 2017

Vol. XXXII — No. 10

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Short-changing state employees

Senate Republican budget ignores collective bargaining laws, slashes proposed raises

The long-awaited Senate Republican budget proposal was released today, and just as it did two years ago, it short-changes state employees and ignores the state's collective bargaining laws.

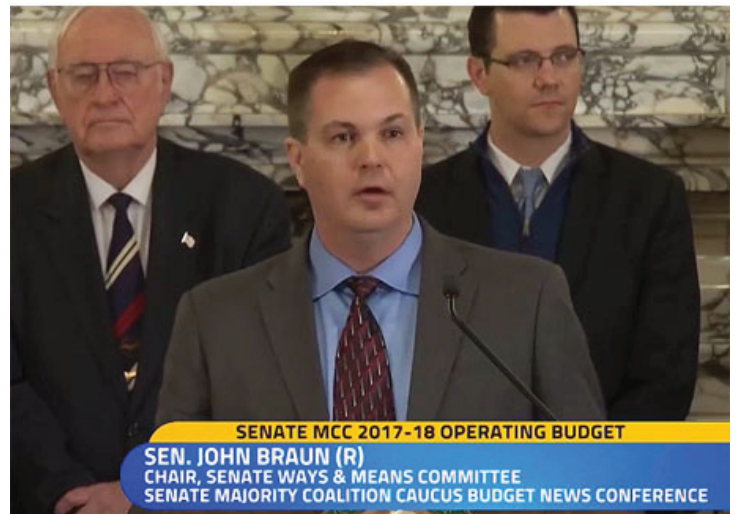
Rather than a straight up-or-down vote on the negotiated and ratified state employee contracts, as required by Washington state law, Senate Republicans want to pick and choose winners and losers. They propose to fund only a few contracts — including the State Patrol and Department of Corrections — and have the Legislature “renegotiate” small lump-sum raises for the vast majority of state employees.

All of the contracts included 6 percent wage increases spread over two years. For most state employees, Republicans are budgeting just \$500 raises in each of the next two years. The average Washington state employee earned \$54,509 for the 2016 budget year. At that salary, Senate Republicans are offering less than a third of the negotiated pay increases, slashing raises from \$3,270 to \$1,000.

“This is not a situation where we can support unprecedented wage increases across the board,” said Sen. John Braun (R-Centralia), the Senate Republicans' chief budget writer, at today's news conference.

Jeff Johnson, President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, responded: “What is truly unprecedented is the magnitude of income and wealth inequality in Washington state and the disproportionate share of taxes that the poor and working class pay, not the much-deserved proposed wage increases for state employees.”

The state's own salary survey found that 99 percent of state job classifications are paying below-market wages. Ninety-nine percent! Some 66 percent of state jobs are more than 25 percent behind, and 23 percent are more than 50 percent behind market rates.



These are the hard-working people who keep our communities safe, care for the elderly and disabled, protect our children, maintain our roads and transportation system, instruct and serve students at state universities and colleges, and provide other essential services. Legislators have heard testimony from many agencies about low pay making it hard to retain experienced state employees and recruit quality new ones.

Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee's budget proposal prioritizes both public education and public workers. It significantly boosts school funding and also covers all state employee contracts. The governor knows that funding the state employee contracts not only shows that he values public employees and the work they do, it begins to address the retention and recruitment crisis, which will make government more effective and efficient.

To accomplish this, Inslee's budget includes some reforms to our state's upside-down revenue system. Right now, the poorest families in Washington are forced to pay the largest percentage of their incomes in taxes of any state in the country. Inslee's budget proposes to close the state tax break on capital gains—which includes income from the sales of stocks, bonds and other assets—a change that will affect only a small portion of the state's wealthiest residents. It also includes a carbon emissions tax on the state's

(SEE REVERSE)





worst polluters. It does not increase taxes on Washington's working families.

Senate Republicans are short-changing state employees because they refuse to clean up the state's tax code. They refuse to close the tax break on capital gains or close other unnecessary, ineffective tax loopholes.

Instead they express open disdain for the state's collective bargaining laws and, lacking the numbers or support for changing those laws, essentially ignore them by arbitrarily proposing different terms and conditions of state workers' employment. That's not how this works.

To be sure, this is just the opening gambit as Republicans position themselves for final budget negotiations. That's when they have traditionally used state employee contracts as bargaining chips for something else they want. *The (Tacoma) News Tribune* reports that Senate Republicans may be holding out for SB 5533, sponsored by Sen. Dino Rossi (R-Sammamish), which bans state employee unions from making campaign contributions to candidates for governor. Writes the *Tribune*: "Senate leaders would like to see the measure pass the full Legislature if they are to approve labor contracts."

These budget proposals are meant to embody the values of the political parties. What does it say about Republican values

that the livelihoods of tens of thousands of state employee families are held hostage for a political game of chicken? What does it say that our hard-working friends and neighbors who provide essential public services are treated as bargaining chips for conservative ideological legislation?

When fully 99 percent of state employees are earning below-market wages, now is not a time to cherry-pick winners who get their negotiated raises and losers who don't.

Conservative legislators often say that government should be run more like a business. If so, what are we to make of The State of Washington, Inc.? Here's a business that:

- Pays below-market wages to virtually all of its employees and is having serious trouble recruiting and retaining workers in key positions,
- Prioritizes most of its business expenses—including giving hefty discounts to certain customers—ahead of its employees, and
- Clings to an antiquated, upside-down pricing system that overcharges the customers who can least afford to pay, while charging less to its deep-pocketed clients.

That sounds like a business model that's destined to fail.

Two important hearings on Wednesday

Tomorrow (Wednesday, March 22), Senate committees will hold hearings on some important House-approved bills supported by the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO:

The Washington Voting Rights Act is scheduled for public hearing in the Senate State Government Committee at 8 a.m. on Wednesday. HB 1800, prime sponsored by Rep. Mia Gregerson, would empower local governments to avoid costly litigation by creating a collaborative process to ensure fair elections, that every vote is protected, and that every community is fairly represented.

The Hanford workers' compensation bill will be heard at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday in the Senate Commerce, Labor & Sports. SHB 1723, sponsored by Rep. Larry Haler (R-Richland) would remove barriers that prevent seriously ill Hanford workers from getting workers' compensation benefits. It passed the House 69-29 on a strong bipartisan vote.