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Enterprise Washington's GROW Program Growing Roots for Our Workforce

Legislative Update: January 27, 2009

With today's massive communications highways, simple and accurate communication on private sector issues is important. After-all, it's the private sector that makes Washington's State such a great place to live and work. Below, please find two columns that will give you a quick overview about what's happening in our state capitol and how you and your employees can use your voice to make a difference by 1. staying informed and 2. communicating with your elected officials about issues that will impact the health of Washington's private sector. In the "To the Employee" section of this E-news you will find a sample email that will help you communicate these important issues to your employees.

To the Executive:

We are just beginning the third week of the 2009 legislative session and already our legislators have been flooded with nearly 1300 bills to consider.

As Washington's private sector, it is our job to sift through these bills and communicate with our elected officials which bills have the greatest potential impact on our future competitiveness.

At the moment, we are most concerned about the deteriorating state budget, efforts to bury the WASL, breaking the Unemployment Insurance Trust to stimulate the economy, and the resurrected effort to tilt the scales toward organized labor (which only comprises 20% of Washington State's workforce) by silencing employers. Below is a summary of these important issues to date (for more about issues [click here.](#)):

Building a Sustainable Budget

This is the 2nd consecutive month where state revenue collections came in well below forecast, and our legislators are now struggling with how to fix this problem. Last week, state budget director Victor Moore told a business group. "I'd be flabbergasted if a tax proposal wasn't on the ballot (this year)".

This flies in the face of responsible priority budgeting and our focus on higher costs on families and

To the Employee:

Below is a sample email message to keep private sector employees up to date on important issues during the legislative session. Simply cut, paste and customize the sample message and send out to your employees in an email, or create a break-room flier.

Sample Email Message to Employees:

Dear Employee;

We want to do our best to keep you up to date on what is happening as our lawmakers consider legislation that will have a great impact on the health of our company. This is the first of many weekly legislative updates to keep you informed and let you know what you can do to help:

Did you know our state legislators have already been flooded with nearly 1300 new bills this legislative session... in the last 2 weeks!

We need to help them understand which of these bills have the greatest impact on our ability to stay competitive in these uncertain times. Read through this week's hot legislative issues and [let your legislators know](#) how important they are to our company and to you:

Building a Sustainable Budget

and new taxes - higher costs on families and businesses - will further reduce consumption and investment, send the wrong message to firms thinking of locating or expanding here, and prolong the bad times.

[Tell your legislators you expect them to live within our means, a budget without new taxes is the right call.](#)

Education Accountability and the WASL

The newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, Randy Dorn announced last week that he would replace the Washington Assessment of Student Learning with a pair of new tests. The business community is watching this closely, particularly to understand his plans for math and science standards. Consider [this editorial in the PI](#) that raises legitimate concerns.

Reforming the Unemployment Insurance System

The 2009 WashACE Redbook shows Washington employers pay the second highest UI tax in the country, \$637 on an average full-time employee, compared with a US average of \$281. The average weekly benefit paid here is \$343.

That's why we think it's risky to tap the fund balance now for economic stimulus. The Governor and Senate Democrats have proposed tapping \$400M of the fund. Employers and employees count on the money in the UI Trust Fund being available to provide income for workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

Tapping the UI Trust Fund to increase benefits, provide temporary tax relief, support training programs, ect., jeopardizes the trust.

Silencing Employers is Not Labor Neutrality

Organized labor has found legislative champions for a proposed law limiting the ability of employers to communicate with workers during union organizing campaign. Only California has passed anything like this, and that measure was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court last year.

If they were to pass this proposal they would send a powerful message to employers that Washington doesn't want their business. (Call it the anti-stimulus package.) That's not a message we want to send.

Expect to hear a lot more about this in the coming weeks.

In response to ever decreasing state revenues, state budget director Victor Moore told a business group last week, "[I'd be flabbergasted if a tax proposal wasn't on the ballot \(this year\)](#)." New taxes - higher costs on families and businesses - will further reduce consumption and investment, send the wrong message to firms thinking of locating or expanding here, and prolong the bad times. [Tell your legislators](#) you expect them to live within our means, a budget without new taxes is the right call.

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Reforming the Unemployment Insurance System

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It has been proposed by state lawmakers that we should tap the fund balance now for economic stimulus. Employers and employees count on the money in the trust being available to provide income for workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own, and should not be raided for other purposes.

Silencing Employers is Not Labor Neutrality

Organized labor has found legislative champions for a proposed law limiting the ability of employers to communicate with workers during union organizing campaign. If our state legislators pass this proposal it would send a powerful message to employers that Washington doesn't want their business. (Call it the anti-stimulus package.) That's not a message we want to send.

Thank you for taking the time to read our weekly legislative update.

Sincerely,

Your Employer

What can you do, right now?

Washington State's success depends on everyone's involvement in the political process on the federal, state and local levels.

Here are some of the best ways to make a difference right now:

- Forward sample emails from "to the Employee" to your employees on a weekly basis and encourage them to communicate directly with legislators.
- Continuing to learn more about the issues by going to www.enterprisewashington.org, or your companies GROW website.
- Make sure your employees are registered to vote! Find your local elections office by going on-line to www.secstate.wa.gov/elections

Get your GROW program up and running!

Your employees want to hear from you, their employer. Research shows that employers are the most credible source of legislative issue information. Please contact Sonja Forster at sonja@enterprisewashington.org to learn more about how you can use GROW more effectively.

Not yet a member of Enterprise Washington? Join us on-line today: www.enterprisewashington.org

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