



WSLC Legislative Update

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A weekly report from the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO



Reduce Olympia's corporate footprint

House Democratic leaders revive liquor store privatization bill

More than 300 union leaders and rank-and-file members who attended the Washington State Labor Council's Legislative Conference on Thursday were wearing stickers that read, "Keep our state liquor store system: Generating Revenue, Protecting the Public." A banner proclaiming the same was hanging on the wall behind the podium as House Speaker Frank Chopp and other Democratic legislative leaders discussed the need to address state budget problems in a thoughtful way that maintains our values and quality of life.

What was going on across the lake at the Capitol stands in direct contrast to that message. What happened demonstrates that the national recession—brought to you by government deregulation, Wall Street greed and corporate malfeasance—is being twisted by some, against all logic and common sense, to fuel anti-government pro-corporate ideology.

House Democratic leaders quietly revived HB 2846, a Republican-sponsored bill to deregulate and privatize the state liquor store system. It had already died in Commerce and Labor Committee due to lack of interest. But now the bill is before the Ways and Means Committee, where there are some legislators more receptive to the idea because they want to "reduce the footprint of state government." **It is scheduled for a public hearing on Wednesday at 3:30 p.m.**

This legislation has been introduced and promptly rejected just about every year since the state began operating liquor stores back in 1933. Most years the idea hasn't even generated enough support to merit a hearing, much less a floor vote. The last time liquor-store privatization advocates succeeded in getting it on the ballot in the 1970s, voters resoundingly rejected it. Subsequent initiative efforts couldn't even get the necessary signatures to make the ballot.

But here we are, in a short 60-day session that is focused on resolving a \$2.7 billion revenue shortfall, and some Democrats think now might be a good time to ram this through?

If this generated some quick cash, you might understand why a desperate, short-sighted budget writer might throw the idea on the table. But it doesn't. Even the bill's advocates ad-

Come to Olympia for Monday's rally

On Presidents Day, the teabaggers will go toe to toe with those who oppose another all-cuts budget.

The Rebuilding Our Economic Future Coalition, which includes the WSLC and several of its largest affiliated unions, is planning a Rally to Protect Our Future at noon on Monday in Olympia, starting at the Tivoli Fountain and proceeding to the Capitol Steps. Union members are urged to attend to tell legislators to avoid devastating cuts to schools, health care, public safety and other services.

Anti-government teabaggers supporting another all-cuts budget will be rallying at the same spot starting at 10 a.m. Right-wing talk show host Dori Monson, one of their rally's speakers, has been advertising their rally on his radio program all week as an opportunity to stand up to the "union thugs" who will be there later in the day.

Monday's noontime rally is not just a labor rally. For example, the Children's Alliance estimates some 500 of its members and their children will attend. Visit OurEconomicFuture.org to see the broad spectrum of advocates for health care, environmental, schools, transit, public safety, and yes, unions that will be there to oppose another all-cuts budget.

If you have the day off, please join us on Monday!

mit this is true. Task forces have repeatedly determined that private stores would not create more revenue for the state in the short or long terms. This effort is all about pandering to the aforementioned anti-government ideologues, not about saving money or protecting the public.

The good news is that Gov. Chris Gregoire reiterated her strong opposition to liquor store deregulation/privatization at Thursday's WSLC legislative conference.

"How much will that help us get out of this \$2.7 billion shortfall? Zip," Gregoire said. She added that the only way

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private liquor stores could generate more state revenue than the current system is by selling a whole lot more liquor, which is not a policy consistent with her values or the values of our state.

The governor also touted our state's record of having the best compliance rate in the nation for avoiding liquor sales to minors. That's true because we have trained, experienced clerks who work on these stores—folks represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers union—who earn a decent wage and aren't motivated to simply to sell, sell, sell.

The idea of killing these 1,000 good family-wage jobs for no reason other than to "reduce government's footprint" should be a non-starter, especially in a place controlled by Democrats. But apparently it isn't. Like House Democrats, the Senate could vote any day upon SB 6204, a similar bill that was amended into yet another \$600,000 study of liquor deregulation and privatization.

We need to remind elected officials to stop wasting precious time and money, and that **making government smaller and deregulation is what got us into this economic mess!**

Please call the Legislative Hotline today at 1-800-562-6000 and leave a message for both of your representatives, your senator and the governor that you oppose HB 2846 and SB 6204. Tell them to maintain our state liquor store system that's generating revenue and protecting our families.

Most Senate Democrats do the right thing

This week, the Senate temporarily suspended Initiative 960, a ballot measure approved by 51% of voters when state coffers were flush with cash in 2007, which requires a two-thirds supermajority to increase state taxes.

The Washington State Labor Council thanks the senators with the guts to do the right thing and vote "yes" on SB 6843, restoring the basic principle of majority rule. A 34% minority of legislators shouldn't be able to tie the state government's hands when our schools, roads, public safety and health, and other critical state services—and the state employees who provide those services—face more devastating cuts, not just this year, but also in the next biennium.

Thank you to the following for supporting SB 6843: Sens. Jean Berkey, Lisa Brown, Tracey Eide, Darlene Fairley, Rosa Franklin, Karen Fraser, Randy Gordon, Jim Hargrove, Brian Hatfield, Mary Margaret Haugen, Ken Jacobsen, Jim Kastama, Karen Keiser, Adam Kline, Jeanne Kohl-Welles, Rosemary McAuliffe, Joe McDermott, Ed Murray, Eric Oemig, Margarita Prentice, Craig Pridemore, Kevin Ranker, Debbie Regala, Phil Rockefeller, Paull Shin, and Rodney Tom.

All Senate Republicans voted "no." (Voters keep putting them in the minority, so they *love* minority rule.) Also voting "no" were Democratic Sens. Steve Hobbs, Claudia Kauffman, Derek Kilmer, Chris Marr and Tim Sheldon.

SB 6843 is now in the House, where today Democrats are

dealing with Republicans' obstructionist procedural tactics intended to delay and derail a vote. It could come to the floor as soon as Saturday. We urge all State Representatives to support this important first step in addressing the revenue shortfall.

U.I.: It's not just a tax, it's a lifeline

Business lobbyists' position on unemployment insurance is extreme: lower the tax rates (again), but *under no circumstances* should benefits be strengthened.

A moderate position would be to pursue both tax rate "smoothing" that business groups want while also strengthening benefits for the real victims of this national recession. As we described in last week's edition, legislators have an opportunity this year for compromise on this issue via a balanced approach that helps businesses, stimulates the economy, and strengthens the safety net for the unemployed.

The Washington State Labor Council has been making an effort to bring to Olympia the stories of real people who have seen their lives decimated by the Great Recession.

People like Josh from Spokane: "Unemployment (insurance) is the only thing that kept me from being homeless... Have you ever donated plasma to get grocery money? It is the most degrading and depressing time of my short adult life. U.I. benefits are truly the only lifeline a lot of us have right now, and we need every bit of help we can get."

People like Sydnee in Seattle: "I was laid off in October 2009. I am a single mother of two and I'm just squeaking by. I get \$550 (per week) on U.I. Rent: \$1125. Bills: \$350. Food: \$400 per month. I do not have insurance (health) right now because U.I. is not enough to cover it."

People like Jackie in Yelm: "I have worked all my life. Last August, I was laid off. I am an experienced and great worker, but I have only received one job interview. Times are hard, and I urge you to think of the people who pay taxes and buy things to keep the economy going. Please protect us."

People like Lee in Gold Bar: "As a lifetime resident of Washington State, I assure you, I have never seen an employment situation this bad. In previous recessions, one of the four males in our extended family have been out of work at a time. This time, it's all of us. I personally have been out for ten months of the last year. U.I. checks are the only things allowing us to keep our home and eat. I am writing to urge you to protect the unemployment system and strengthen its benefits. In this economy, every single dollar counts."

There are literally tens of thousands of tragic stories like these out there because there are tens of thousands of families relying on U.I. benefits right now just to survive. And they are immediately spending those dollars in their communities, which is saving businesses and saving jobs.

Our concern is that some legislators can't see this forest of suffering families for the tasseled trees of whining business lobbyists who surround them in Olympia.