1997 Legislative Committee Report

from

Rep. Steve Van Luven
48th District

Summer 1997

Dear friends,

Long before a bill becomes law, it must go through the committee process of the Legislature. While hundreds of new laws pass the Legislature each year, you never hear about most of them. Yet you are expected to obey them.

This year, thousands of bills were heard by legislative committees in both the House and the Senate. Many survived the committee process. Others did not. Some bills passed committee only to die before reaching the House or Senate floors. Others passed the House and Senate and were signed into law or vetoed by the governor.

As chairman of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee, I am a believer in the committee process. There is some legislation introduced that doesn't deserve to become law and may even be harmful to the people we represent. The committee process is the place where we can sift out those bills. It is the first stop in our system of checks and balances.

This report provides information to help you understand more about the committee process, the top bills from each committee that will become law this month, and how you can become involved with legislative committees.

It is your participation in the legislative process that truly makes our government representative of the people of Washington state. After reading this newsletter, I encourage you to call or write me if you have questions, comments, concerns or ideas about legislation and state government.

Thank you for allowing me the great opportunity to serve as your state representative.

Steve

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The committee system

The committee process is an extremely important and integral part of the makeup of the Legislature. During the 1997 legislative session which adjourned at the end of April after 105 days, 6,070 bills were introduced. Because of the enormous number of bills introduced during a regular session and the limited time for consideration, it would be nearly impossible for the entire legislative body to give proper consideration and study to each proposed bill. That's why the committee system was developed — to allow the detailed study of bills.

After a bill is introduced and read for the first time, it is assigned to an appropriate committee by the president of the Senate or, in the House, by the speaker.

Committee chairmen control the agenda. The chairman decides if and when the bill is to be heard by the entire committee. The position of a committee chairman is such an important one that even when the House majority leader stepped down last year to run for governor, House committee chairmen were reluctant to run for the position because they didn't want to give up their chairmanships. Half of those now in leadership positions are new legislators. Many long-time, experienced legislators prefer to chair committees rather than be in leadership.

Once the chairman decides a bill will be heard, a public hearing is scheduled. Three years ago when Republicans gained control of the House, we changed the committee process to allow citizens to be heard first during the public hearing. Prior to Republican control, state agencies and lobbyists were often allowed to testify first, and very often, time would run out before citizens were allowed to testify. Although in past years there were good and fair chairmen who allowed citizens to testify, it was frustrating to other citizens who had traveled hundreds of miles to testify, only to be told by a chairman that they would not be heard. We felt this was wrong.

Now citizens are heard first, and if there is time, we'll have the state agencies and lobbyists testify.

After the bill is heard, it may or may not be considered by the committee. The rules of the House and Senate require that a bill be reported back with one of the following recommendations: that the bill "Do Pass;" that it "Do Pass with Amendments;" that it be referred to another committee; or that it be "Indefinitely Postponed."

Once a bill passes its respective committee, it is usually sent to the Rules Committee. This committee decides which bills will be brought before the respective houses for consideration. The process of a bill going through the Rules Committee is a formality and the committee takes no public testimony.

The House and the Senate each has a Rules Committee. Even if a bill has passed a House or Senate committee, but is not reported out of the Rules Committee, that measure may be dead for the year. But if the Rules Committee gives its approval, the measure can be put on the calendar for a full vote by the House or Senate.

Top committee bills

There are 31committees in the state Legislature, 17 in the House, 14 in the Senate. The following is a synopsis of major legislation which passed some of the House committees and subsequently passed the Legislature.

The **House Agriculture and Ecology Committee** approved and the Legislature passed a package of bills to protect and enhance our state's water resources. Legislation included in the water-related bills addressed water rights; statewide and locally based watershed planning; appeal procedures for water-related actions; and re-opening the water rights claim filing period. Several of the bills were vetoed or partially vetoed by the governor.

Gov. Locke congratulates Rep. Steve Van Luven for writing and sponsoring HB 2192 which allowed voters to decide on financing for a new Seahawks' football stadium.

Rep. Steve Van Luven • 48th District

The state's operating budget was the main bill to pass through the **House Appropriations Committee**. The spending plan for 1997-99 is $19.07 billion. This is the smallest state budget increase — 7.7 percent — since 1971. The final budget is $150 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit. By staying below the 601 lid, we reduce spending that much *more* over time — a considerable savings for taxpayers.

The **House Capital Budget Committee** approved full funding of the state's share of all local school construction projects for the next two years. The capital budget also includes $540 million for construction projects to improve and expand opportunities in higher education.

The **House Children and Family Services Committee** drafted legislation that significantly changes our state's welfare system. The bill, which was signed into law, emphasizes personal responsibility and work. Provisions include: time limits on benefits (five years); requirements to work, search for work or perform community service; child-care assistance for working parents; job training; and that teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits.

The **House Natural Resources Committee** approved a measure that will permanently ban offshore gas and oil exploration drilling along Washington's coastline.

Top Committee Bills continued on back

The **House Law and Justice Committee** and the **House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee** worked together to come up with legislation reforming our state's juvenile justice system.

Under the bill, 16- and 17-year-olds will be prosecuted as adults in the following cases: murder, rape, drive-by shooting, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender used a firearm. The current sentencing "point system" is replaced with sentencing ranges based on two factors: the seriousness of the current offense and the number of prior felony and misdemeanor sentences. The measure also includes several alternatives to jail or prison time, including boot camps, home detention, community service, and mandatory school attendance. It was the first major reform of our state's juvenile justice system in 20 years.

The **House Education Committee** passed a package of bills that will increase the value of a public education and bring education closer to home. Signed into law by the governor, the A-D-Cs of Education package stands for Academics with Accountability, school Discipline, and Community involvement and Choice.

A bill to increase the safety and care of people in long-term care facilities passed through the **House Health Care Committee** before receiving the approval of the Legislature and becoming law. HB 1850 includes important consumer protection provisions and expands the role of the state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman to ensure greater safety and higher standards of care.

Gubernatorial vetoes

Records dating back to the Great Depression show that no other governor has vetoed more legislation in one session than Gov. Gary Locke did this year. Despite bipartisan support for much of the legislation that passed the Legislature, Gov. Locke spared no ink from his veto pen.

This year, the Legislature passed 519 bills. Gov. Locke vetoed or partially vetoed 125 (24 percent) of them. Even bills that passed unanimously in the House and Senate were cut down by the governor's veto pen.

	Bills passed	Veto	Partial veto	% vetoed
GARY LOCKE				
'97	519	62	63	24.0
MIKE LOWRY				
'96	346	22	27	13.6
'95	455	17	41	12.7
'94	324	7	27	10.5
'93	561	8	35	7.7
TOTAL	1,686	54	130	10.9
BOOTH GARDNER				
'92	247	7	26	13.4
'91	406	9	45	13.4
'90	341	8	37	13.2
'89	468	18	65	17.8
'88	292	3	26	9.9
'87	547	9	65	13.5
'86	326	1	46	14.4
'85	484	7	52	12.2
TOTAL	3,111	62	362	13.6
JOHN SPELLMAN				
'84	297	8	25	11.1
'83	408	14	22	8.8
'82	235	3	18	9.0
'81	369	8	27	9.5
TOTAL	1,309	33	92	9.6

Top Committee Bills continued

You will be voting in November on a property tax reduction referendum approved by the **House Finance Committee.** The three main provisions of SB 5835 would make permanent a temporary 4.7 percent cut in the state's portion of the property tax; limit both state and local property tax levies to the rate of inflation or 6 percent, whichever is lower; and limit annual increases in assessments to stop the dramatic spikes in property tax evaluations.

With revenue tight from inflation and more fuel-efficient cars, the **House and Senate Transportation Committee** chairmen began investigating the possibility of increasing the gas tax to pay for increased capacity of our highway system. That idea became increasingly unpopular. Many people felt as I do that other alternatives must first be considered before proposing a tax increase. In the end, the committees and the Legislature approved a bare-bones transportation budget that includes a performance audit of the entire transportation system in Washington state.

Finally, we come to the committee I chair, the **House Trade and Economic Development Committee**.

I worked with my committee to provide a Seahawks' stadium financing package that will not increase taxes or affect the state's general fund. The measure, which eventually became Referendum 48, passed the Legislature in the final week of the session. On June 17, Referendum 48 passed. The financing package along with money from Paul Allen will provide an open-air football and soccer stadium next to the new Mariners' stadium in Seattle.

How you can become involved in the committee process

In addition to holding public hearings in Olympia during session, legislative committees conduct meetings in various areas throughout the state during interim (the time between legislative sessions). A booklet entitled, "Legislative Meeting Schedule," which is published weekly during session and every three months during interim, is available from the Washington State Legislature for an annual paid subscription of $10. The booklet covers all committee meeting schedules, including times and locations. For information about obtaining this booklet, contact Senate Word Processing at (360) 786-7344.

Also, if you would like to learn more about how to participate in the legislative process, call or write my office and ask for a free copy of ***"A Citizen's Guide to Effective Legislative Participation."*** This handy guide will help you to learn more about how you can become involved in the legislative process.

As always, if you have any questions, comments, ideas or concerns about legislation or state government, feel free to call or write my office.

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