Senator Rosemary McAuliffe
1st Legislative District
1998 Legislative Report

Dear Friends:

The Legislature convened last January during a silvery winter snow storm. I came ready to work. It was a short session and our responsibility was to write the supplemental budget — one that met the state's urgent needs in public education and transportation, two issues critical to the people of the 1st Legislative District. Unfortunately, it ended as a session of missed opportunities. Democratic proposals that would have improved public education, increased health insurance coverage for children, and offered up more financial aid to prospective college students found no support this session. A bipartisan effort for transportation failed. Bills that did pass offered little to the working families of the state. While the Democrats were poised and ready to address these and other important issues, we found little leadership or will from the other side of the aisle.

In the area of education, I came to Olympia focused on the need to reduce class size and to give children who may need it, the extra time necessary to learn their best. But the final budget had no money for these important issues. This despite the fact that, due to lower than expected enrollment, the state had approximately $53 million dedicated to education from the prior budget that we could have used. With the funds available, to refuse to reinvest $50 million into class size reduction or helping children meet the state's higher academic standards was unacceptable.

As to the second priority, transportation, all that was offered up was a short-term fix for a critical long-term problem. Had there been an effort for all parties to come together and support a compromise, we could have passed a responsible plan. Instead, the Republicans again refused to lead and voted to send the transportation package to the ballot to side-step a joint effort and the Governor's probable veto. Politics as usual is not why I came to Olympia. I think we could have done better. And I believe the people of Washington have a right to expect much better from their Legislature.

Thanks to those of you who responded to the survey in my pre-session newsletter. The results are inside. Also in this newsletter is more detail about what did — and didn't — happen during the 1998 session. I hope you find it valuable and that it shows the work I strive to do to respond to your concerns.

Finally, the district office in Bothell is back open for business, and I invite you to contact us or drop by at any time.

Sincerely,

Rosemary McAuliffe

Rosemary McAuliffe
State Senator, 1st Legislative District

Campus Ground-Breaking

I am pleased to announce the ground-breaking ceremony for the joint University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia Community College campus will take place **MAY 28TH** at the Truly Farm. Come join me, Governor Locke, and other state and local elected officials to celebrate this long-awaited event. Watch for details in your local newspapers or call my office for more information.

Session Preview Questionnaire Results

I want to thank you for the tremendous response to the 1st Legislative District Survey from my pre-session newsletter. I appreciate all of you who took the time to answer the questions thoughtfully and share your comments. I was particularly impressed with how many of you are involved in local civic, religious, political, and other organizations, volunteering your time. Nearly 1,000 surveys were returned! I thought you would be interested in the results.

1998 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SURVEY QUESTIONS & RESULTS

1. Budget Surplus

Due to Washington's strong economy and the tax revenues it's generating, the state has about $185 million available to use while staying within the spending limits imposed by Initiative 601. ***Indicate your first priority as to the best way that money could be used:***

- Working to reduce class size in our public schools — 32 %
- Reducing traffic congestion — 28 %
- Expanding access to the state's Basic Heath Plan — 11 %
- Reducing property taxes — 29 %

Like those who responded, reducing class sizes is one of my highest priorities. Support for this idea is growing. More than 300 parents and children held a class size rally in Olympia this session letting their legislators know that lower class sizes are important to the education of all students. They will be back to promote this issue in 1999, as will I. With your support we can make a difference for the children in our classrooms.

2. Education

Our students are now taking the first steps in meeting higher education standards under the state's Education Reform Act. Educators, parents, and community members all have roles to play so that students can achieve their best. ***Do you need information about the new higher standards and how you could be involved?***

Yes — 25% **No** — 75%

As we strive for higher academic standards, you will see the press follow closely the results of the new 4th grade tests and the 7th grade (voluntary) tests. Please remember we are asking more of our teachers and students and they need our support.

For those who needed more information about education reform, a package of materials was sent out.

3. Transportation

While most everyone seems to agree that the state needs a long-term plan to keep our transportation system up to date, our primary funding for transportation, the gas tax, hasn't been keeping pace with demand. ***How do you think we should fund additional transportation projects that would ease congestion on our highways?***

- Shift the revenue from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (car tabs) and dedicate it solely for transportation, leaving a reduction in the general fund, which pays for schools — 58%
- Increase the sales tax and dedicate part for transportation projects — 5%
- Increase the gas tax to keep up with inflation — 37%

While shifting the revenue generated from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (car tabs) for roads makes sense on the surface, be aware that it would take money out of the general fund. Public education currently accounts for 47 percent of the general fund spending. Because of spending limits established by Initiative 601, if we take the car tab money away from the general fund, children or roads becomes the choice. That isn't fair. We can't trade asphalt for our children's education.

4. Technology

Technology and computers open the door to knowledge for us all and provide us a tool to communicate with others. Would you go to your local school to take computer classes if such classes were made available after school hours at a minimal fee?

Yes — 48% **No** — 52%

Lake Washington school district currently has a community school computer program with classes 3 nights a week at the Redmond Center Administration office. Both the Northshore and Edmonds school districts will begin offering community classes in the fall. Call your local school district for more information.

Sen. McAuliffe speaks to a class size reduction rally on the Capitol steps last February.

EDUCATION DRAWS THE SHORT STRAW THIS SESSION

Even though this was a short session, just 60 days, there was still plenty of time to begin to solve some of the problems facing our public schools. I went to Olympia this session to champion smaller class size, additional time for children to learn, and additional technology training for our teachers. Unfortunately, the majority party had other ideas. *(continued next page)*

They chose to spend our limited time here chipping away at teachers' ability to make their own decisions about how to teach most effectively. You probably heard a great deal about the "phonics bill." This bill started out as a program that would provide teachers training in the use of phonics and then have them return to their schools to use that method *exclusively* when teaching reading. Having legislators tell teachers how to teach did not sit well with many teachers, parents, and education professionals. Legislators need to legislate and allow those best qualified — educators and parents — to make local decisions about effective programs in their community schools. Phonics is an important component to comprehensive reading instruction. But no single approach or program is effective with all learners. Teachers need the freedom to use whatever methods work best for children struggling to learn to read.

On a positive note, this bill also included $8 million for a tutoring and mentoring program for struggling young readers. Crafted by Governor Locke, this effort helps both our children and teachers and allows the community to be more greatly involved in public education. For information about how to get involved, contact my office at 481-7459.

A FUTURE COLLEGE EDUCATION AT TODAY'S PRICES

Last year the Legislature approved a proposal of mine and passed legislation establishing a pre-paid college tuition program. This exciting program allows families to buy units of college tuition at today's prices, even if their children are years away from actually attending school. It's a wonderful way to keep the costs of a degree down and invest in your child's future. The program will begin this summer, thanks to a $1.3 million appropriation in the 1998 supplemental budget for start-up costs.

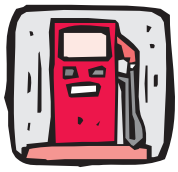
The pre-paid college tuition program is designed to be simple, affordable, and understandable. Purchases can be made in small amounts or for a full year of school. The tuition units may be redeemed later at public or private institutions, in state or out of state. It's a great deal all around and can save families literally thousands of dollars on the cost of a college education if they begin purchasing the tuition early. Call the Higher Education Coordinating Board at (360) 753-7800 for more information.

GROUP HOME SAFETY LEGISLATION

Through a bipartisan effort, the Legislature passed a bill to ensure group homes will follow strict regulations when placing juvenile offenders in our communities. Some of the changes include:

- improved security and risk assessment;
- allowing communities to veto placement of high-risk offenders; and,
- greater sharing of information between agencies and communities.

Thank you Lt. Gen. Ted Jenes and members of the Mountlake Terrace community for your help in crafting this bill. All of the meetings you attended made a real difference.



TRANSPORTATION

What we needed. A long-range, well-financed solution to the state's transportation problems.

What we got. A limited, band-aid fix with a long-term bill.

It was a disappointing session for those of us hoping to make some progress in addressing our state's transportation and infrastructure needs. If you commute to work and sit in heavy traffic each day, then you know we can't wait much longer to solve Washington's growing transportation problems.

At a time when our highways are choked by congestion and our bridges are in need of repair, our state's Republican lawmakers, in my opinion, chose politics over progress. With a transportation crisis that's beginning to threaten the region's economic viability, what we need is a responsible, long-term plan to solve the problem. Unfortunately, that's not what we got.

Despite the fact that from the beginning of the legislative session transportation was touted as one of the highest priorities, the plan ultimately put before the Legislature was a complicated, convoluted mixture of tax cuts, fund transferring, and debt authorization. It takes away money currently used for schools and children and diverts it to roads, incurring the largest debt in state history in the process. And then it asks our children and grandchildren to pick up the tab.

The numbers are staggering. The plan is based on the state authorizing **$1.9 billion** in bonds to fund just five years of transportation projects. But we'll be paying off that debt for 25 years. So, long after those projects are finished – and worn out again – our children will still be paying for them. And how will we pay for the next five year plan? *(continued next page)*

(*TRANSPORTATION continued*)

The transportation plan includes a referendum clause that places it on the November ballot. The citizen members of the Legislature were elected to make tough decisions and find solutions. We have to stop thinking about the next election and start thinking about the next generation.

THE LEGISLATURE GETS TOUGH ON DRUNK DRIVING

Last year, more than 17,000 people in the United States were killed — and one million more were injured — in alcohol-related accidents. Accidents in Washington accounted for more than 350 of those deaths.

In an effort to save lives, the Legislature passed a package of bills this session aimed at reducing the incidence of drunk driving. The bills had bipartisan support. The changes to the law include:

- Reducing the legal blood-alcohol concentration level from .10 percent to .08 percent.
- Allowing the state to suspend the license of a first-time offender for 90 days before trial.
- Limiting to once in a lifetime a drunk-driving suspect's ability to win a deferred prosecution.
- Mandating ignition interlock devices on the vehicles of some drunk drivers.
- Allowing home electronic monitoring instead of jail in some cases.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

I think nearly everyone in the district is familiar with Wayne Curve on SR 522. This dangerous stretch of road has been the site of numerous automobile accidents, resulting in an average of one death per year. I'm seeking volunteer community members to join me in efforts to increase safety on Wayne Curve and reduce the chances of another fatal accident. If you would like to be a part of this important community safety group, please call my office at 481-7459.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP - STAY IN TOUCH

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