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Campaign season is already underway in Washington State with candidate filing week beginning on May 14. In the Legislature all 98 House seats and half of the Senate seats are on the ballot this year. With the tight margins of control in both chambers, there has been considerable focus on select swing districts. In addition, an unusually large number of legislators have announced retirement plans creating uncertainty in a number of open seats.

Following is a summary of recent legislative and regulatory activity in Washington State.

Business & Labor

New Utilities & Transportation Director Appointed

Mark L. Johnson has been appointed as the new Washington State Utilities & Transportation Director. He replaces Steve King who is retiring.

WA Economy Gets High Marks

A recent national study ranked Washington State's economy as first in the nation. As reported in this *Washington State Wire* [blog](#), the study used 27 metrics and pointed to productivity from Amazon, Boeing and Microsoft as driving the ranking.

Workplace Information from Attorney General's Office

The Washington State Attorney General's Office announced in April it has created flyers for the workplace explaining to employees what steps to take if they experience sexual harassment. As noted in this [news release](#), the flyers are available in Spanish and English and can be downloaded free of charge [here](#). The office also recently created [flyers](#) for employers and employees outlining specific civil rights that pregnant employees have due to a Washington State law passed in 2017 called the [Healthy Starts Act](#).

Revenue: State Senator Opposes Seattle Head Tax

Senate Minority Leader Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville) announced he is drafting legislation for the 2019 session to prohibit per-head taxes on employers in the state. Schoesler stated his intention is to block a head tax currently under consideration by the Seattle City Council, as reported in this *King 5* [news story](#).

Behavioral Health

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) will be hosting a town hall on behavioral health on June 6 in Vancouver. As noted in this *The Columbian* [news brief](#), the data collected will be used for system planning and improvement by Washington State.

Healthcare: Opioid Epidemic

A recently released U.S. Senate committee [study](#) documents that opioid overdose deaths have cost Washington State \$34 billion over a four-year time-span from 2012 to 2016. This *Seattle Times* [article](#) explains that the study is part of a launch of the Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018, being introduced by U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D). In related news, DSHS will be holding a second public hearing on a proposed Pierce County opioid treatment program on May 10. As explained in this DSHS [news release](#), due to the large number of people who attended the first hearing a second hearing was added to ensure adequate opportunity for public comment.

Police Use of Force - I-940

Well-known Washington State ballot initiative supporter Tim Eyman won the first round of a lawsuit filed against Washington State regarding the constitutionality of the Legislature's passage of an initiative relating to police use of force. The judge ruled the Legislature violated the state constitution by passing the initiative as written and then immediately passing legislation to amend the initiative language. As explained in this Associated Press [article](#), the judge ordered that the original initiative must go on the ballot as written for consideration by the voters.

K-12 Education Funding

McCleary Decision Update

While legislators have steered billions of additional dollars into basic education in recent years, the 2018 school year will be the first chance for the state Supreme Court to assess if the amount is "constitutionally adequate." The plaintiffs and additional third parties have recently weighed in to argue that the Court should not find the Legislature in compliance with its mandate to adequately fund basic education. The two most recent filings in support of the Court retaining jurisdiction can be viewed [here](#). Still in place is the Court's \$100,000 per day fine imposed against the Legislature for its failure to timely approve a school funding plan. An update on the matter appears in this *Herald Net* [article](#).

Preparing for the 2019-2021 Biennium

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) recently released this [online survey](#) asking for input from the public about K-12 education funding priorities. The OSPI will use the survey results to help develop a K-12 education budget proposal for the Legislature's consideration in 2019.

Environment/Natural Resources

Wildfire Season

State officials have warned that the start of wildfire season this year could be as early as April, as reported in this NPR [news story](#).

Farmland Solar Panels

The Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council recently approved and expedited a review for a project that would transform about 200 acres of crop sites into solar panel locations. As explained in this *Seattle Times* [article](#), the solar panels would generate five megawatts of power for Puget Sound Energy. The project is receiving opposition because of its impact on agricultural land.

Salmon Culverts

Currently Washington State is involved in a case in the federal courts relating to treaty issues with Native American Tribes and salmon culverts. Culverts can reduce salmon access to streams and many have been constructed by the state. As outlined in this *My Northwest* [article](#), the tribes are questioning if they should receive more than the current agreed-upon half of the

access to fishing grounds if the quantity of fish they are entitled to is being diminished due to actions by the state.

Marijuana

Recently the Tax Foundation produced this [summary](#) of recreational marijuana taxes in the eight states that have legal markets. Washington State currently implements a 37% sales tax on the product, which is on the higher-end of the spectrum.

Initiatives

A coalition is gathering signatures for an initiative to the ballot that would require Washington State residents who earn \$600,000 or more per year to pay the same share of their income in taxes as those who annually earn less. As reported in this *My Northwest* [article](#), to qualify for the ballot 260,000 signatures must be collected by July 6.

Important Dates

- Candidate Filing Week May 14 to May 18
- Primary Election August 7
- General Election November 6