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As the 2018 fall campaign season comes to a close with the November 6 general election just weeks away, Washington's legislators are actively planning for the 2019 session. The first formal activity occurs during Assembly Days in Olympia. During Assembly Days legislators reconvene in Olympia to welcome new members, organize their respective caucus committee assignments and plan for the upcoming session. Draft Assembly Days schedules for the House and Senate were released this month. The Senate will convene on November 14 and 15 followed by the House on December 3 and 4. Both chambers are scheduled to hold a joint Assembly Day on December 5. Following Assembly Days, the legislators will return to Olympia on January 14 for the first day of the 2019 session.

Below is a summary of political, legislative and regulatory highlights in Washington State over the past month.

### **General Election**

In addition to determining party control in each chamber of the Legislature, the November 6 Washington State general election will include several key initiatives highlighted below.

#### *Carbon Fee Initiative 1631*

The Carbon Fee [Initiative 1631](#) is receiving considerable attention as described in this *The Olympian* [article](#). If passed by voters, the initiative would implement the nation's first direct fee charged on carbon emissions.

#### *Grocery Tax Initiative 1634*

If passed by voters, [Initiative 1634](#) would ban new taxes on soda and groceries. As reported in this *Spokesman Review* [article](#), the initiative is backed by a \$13 million campaign funded primarily by companies in the soda industry.

#### *Firearms Initiative 1639*

[Initiative 1639](#) proposes to require enhanced background checks, training, and waiting periods for sales or delivery of semiautomatic assault rifles; criminalize certain storage and unauthorized use; impose age limitations; and enact other firearm-safety requirements.

### *Legislative Races*

State Rep. Matt Manweller (R-Ellensburg) has been asked by his party to resign. This request is in response to sexual misconduct allegations facing Rep. Manweller. As explained in this *Seattle Times* [article](#), Manweller has responded that if he wins he plans to resign after the general election.

### **Budget**

#### *Revenue Projections Up*

As noted in this Office of Financial Management (OFM) [news release](#), the most recent quarterly state revenue forecast projects revenue increases for the 2017-2019 biennium of \$348 million and for the 2019-2021 biennium of \$443 million. The OFM recently stated that rapid growth in cannabis revenue in Washington State has now plateaued. Overall, Washington State is projected to have \$3.2 billion in reserves in the current budget.

#### *Governor's Draft 2019-2021 Budget*

The governor's draft 2019-2021 budget is being prepared by OFM. State agency requests for the upcoming biennium can be viewed [here](#). These requests help shape the governor's proposed budget, which will be released publicly in December. This proposed budget is a vehicle for the governor to provide budget guidance to legislators, but it is non-binding. Legislators will draft their own 2019-2021 biennium operating, transportation and capital budgets during the upcoming 2019 105-day session.

#### *K-12 Education Funding*

On September 12, House Appropriations held a work session about K-12 education funding related to the *McCleary* decision. As explained in this *Everett Herald* [article](#), it is anticipated that teacher compensation stakeholders will be working on legislative fixes to the current K-12 state-funding plan. Proposed adjustments in 2019 to the Legislature's 2018 *McCleary* fix could include reforming the rules governing local levies.

### **Business & Labor**

#### *Janus decision*

On September 12 the Joint Employment Relations Committee met to discuss the *Janus* decision and how Washington State should respond. The meeting included this OFM [presentation](#) about the *Janus* decision. The *Janus* decision ruled that state law couldn't require nonmembers of unions to pay union dues.

#### *Senate Economic, Development & International Trade*

The Senate Economic, Development & International Trade Committee held a work session on September 24 to discuss trade, tariffs and NAFTA. You can view the agenda and presentations from the work session [here](#). During the work session staff reported that Washington State agriculture is 12% of Washington State's economy. Its top trade partners in order are Canada (\$1.3B), Japan (\$1B), China (\$594M), South Korea (\$397M), and Mexico (\$358M).

### **Transportation**

There will be a full Joint Transportation Committee meeting on October 4 in Vancouver. On the agenda are the following two topics.

### *Long-Range Plan for New Ferries*

A long-range plan for new ferry vessels was recently released. As explained in this KIRO news [article](#), ferry ridership is expected to increase 30% by 2040. There is a 45-day comment period on the plan that runs through October 25. You can view the plan [here](#).

### *Washington-Oregon Bridge*

As reported in this *The Oregonian* [article](#). Senator Annette Cleveland (D-Vancouver) has renewed the conversation to fund an I-5 bridge crossing between Washington State and Oregon.

## **Social Services**

The foster care system in Washington State is experiencing a shortage of foster parents and group treatment facilities. Foster children are being housed in hotels until they can be placed with a family or in a facility. This issue was investigated and reported about in this *Crosscut* [article](#), which stated 195 foster children spent over 1,000 combined nights in hotels over the past year. The cost to the state per night spent in a hotel is \$2,100, costing taxpayers an estimated \$6.1 million since 2015.

## **Law & Justice**

Due to a significant backlog, it is taking up to six months to get the results from blood toxicology tests sent to the Washington State toxicology lab. The lab is staffed with 22 people. As explained in this KIRO [news story](#), there is a 6,000-case backlog that is causing prosecutors to delay proceedings in DUI cases.

## **Dental & Health Care**

### *Expanded Dental Care Options*

Expanded legislative funding for dental care access in Washington State has resulted in an expansion of dental health care options for low-income Washington State residents. As noted in this *Crosscut* [article](#), the Legislature included \$16 million statewide in capital budget support for expanding dental care options for low-income residents. In addition, in 2017 the Legislature passed a bill to require the Health Care Authority to contract with dental health plans or managed health care plans to provide carved-out managed dental services as early as July of 2019.

### *Health Benefit Exchange Open Enrollment Coming Soon*

The Washington State Health Benefit Exchange Board (Exchange) certified 40 qualified health plans and six qualified dental plans for 2019. Open enrollment for the plans will start November 1 and go through December 15. The average rate increase for health insurance plans is 13.8%. You can view the available plans for 2019 on the Exchange [here](#).

### *Federal Money Secured to Tackle Opioid Epidemic*

Washington State received \$21.5 million from the federal government "State Opioid Response" grants for combatting opioid-related overdoses and deaths. Washington State plans to use the funding to further its opioid response plan. Specifically, among other things, this includes increasing access to medication-assisted treatment for addicts and community prevention services, such as outreach and training on safe storage and safe opioid prescribing practices and school-based specialists.

## **Environment**

### *Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force*

Washington State's Democratic Governor Jay Inslee's Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force recently released a [draft plan](#) to help boost the salmon population and help save Northwest orcas. The goal of the plan is to increase the whale population by 10 whales in ten years. One of the key strategies in the plan is to increase the Chinook salmon population. Public comment on the report is invited until midnight on October 7. An updated draft of the plan will be released on October 17 and a new public comment period will be held October 24 to 29. Final task force recommendations will be published on November 16.

### *Inslee attends Global Climate Action Summit*

Governor Inslee attended the Global Climate Action Summit that was held in San Francisco in September. The focus of the summit was to launch new commitments and accelerate action in fighting against climate change. At the summit, Inslee gave a keynote address and discussed ways both companies and governments can use procurement to close the carbon loophole.

### *Joint Energy Supply & Energy Conservation Meeting*

On September 24, there was a joint meeting of the Energy Supply and Energy Conservation Committees. Topics on the agenda included the [present state of Washington's electric grid](#) and the [future of conventional and alternative energy technologies](#).