



Washington State Visit

The Washington State Legislature has the unusual situation of having shifted majorities in between 2017 and 2018, the first and second year of the biennium. This marks the first time in five years that the same party has a majority in both legislative chambers. The current 60-day session appears poised to conclude on time. Last year, the legislature went into three special sessions after the regular 105-days scheduled on odd years, or the first year of the biennium. Apart from a carbon tax bill, other legislative bills being presented are similar to what legislatures in other western states are considering.

In the first couple of weeks of this year's session, the \$4 billion capital budget that was not passed last year did pass and was signed by Governor Jay Inslee. The main obstacle to its adoption last year appeared to be over the *Whatcom County vs. Hirst, Futurewise, et al.* decision, also known as the "Hirst decision." The 2016 Washington Supreme Court ruling changed how counties approve or deny building permits that use permit-exempt wells for their source of water. To learn more about this ruling, please click [here](#). The "Hirst Fix" was one of the first priorities tackled by the legislature through [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6091](#), which passed on January 18 and was thereafter signed by Governor Inslee.

Other bills introduced in the session target sexual harassment in the workplace, state net-neutrality, rent control, gun control, ban the box (campaign to remove disclosure of previous criminal convictions in employment applications), and ways to manage the opioid crisis. One piece of legislation that is being touted as a first in the nation, if passed, is the carbon tax proposal championed by the Governor. Essentially, it would set a \$20 price tag on carbon beginning in July 2019, then increase every year by 3.5%, plus inflation.

According to the Governor's office, the tax will generate \$3.3 billion in its first four years. Those gains would be reinvested into flood management, irrigation improvement, emissions reductions like electric charging stations and purchases of electric buses, as well as support for low-income communities' transition. Some exemptions would be made under this plan for fuels used by aircrafts and agriculture. Additionally, some tax credits would be granted on investments by companies to reduce their emissions. Pudget Sound Energy, the state's largest utility, and Microsoft Corporation have gone on the record as supporting this proposal but opponents worry about the increase in costs to consumers. Initial projections indicate that electricity bills would increase by 5% by 2035 and fuel would increase by 11% for Washingtonians. The lead sponsor of the bill is Senator Reuven Carlyle. To read more about the Governor's carbon tax proposal, please click [here](#).



West

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

CSG West staff visited Olympia and conducted outreach to members on January 30 through February 1. We were kindly invited to both House Caucus meetings for a quick hello and introduction. We also hosted a Western Legislative Academy Alumni dinner that provided an opportunity to reconnect with graduates of this premier professional development program and hear about their current work. A special thanks to CSG West Immediate Past Chair, Senator Sam Hunt, for facilitating meetings, and his staff, Meagan and Alicia, for sharing their office space with us!