

2015



CHAIR'S REPORT

Smart Policy and Strategic Investments for a Better Washington

Governor Jay Inslee and the Legislature are to be applauded for policies and critical investments enacted this year that will yield benefits for generations to come.

Lawmakers approved the first comprehensive transportation investment package in a decade, the result of three years of intensive bipartisan collaboration. With \$16 billion in new investments — including \$1.3 billion for preservation and maintenance, \$8.8 billion for project construction, and \$1 billion for the state's multimodal fund — this package will lead to a safer, more efficient, and integrated transportation system for all of Washington.



Lawmakers delivered a balanced budget that makes unprecedented new investments in public education. It invests in early learning, takes significant steps to address the Washington Supreme Court's McCleary decision regarding K-12 education funding, includes targeted investments in high-demand STEM programs, and allows for reductions in tuition at the state's postsecondary institutions.

Along with funding, lawmakers made advancements in education policy that will improve education quality and accessibility across the preschool-to-postsecondary continuum. They passed the Early Start Act, which sets quality standards and provides for expansion of early learning programs. They passed legislation requiring creation of K-12 computer science learning standards and a computer science endorsement for teachers. They approved a phased reduction in resident undergraduate tuition at the state's postsecondary institutions, which will make postsecondary education more accessible for Washington families.

Overall, the 2015-17 budget increases spending by more than \$4.4 billion over the previous biennium. This is the largest current-dollar spending increase in state history. It was possible thanks to robust economic growth. Long-term, lawmakers should remain vigilant about sustainability as concerns may arise in the event of future downturn.

Legislative successes achieved in 2015 are the result of bipartisanship, compromise and a collective commitment to building a better state. The work doesn't stop here. As a state, we must continue to improve and adapt for the future, focusing on the fundamentals – education, infrastructure and economic vitality – that will expand opportunity and shared prosperity to all of Washington. Together, we can make Washington a great state to live and do business.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brad Tilden".

Brad Tilden
Chief Executive Officer, Alaska Air Group
2015 Washington Roundtable Chair

2015 POLICY PRIORITY:

ENACT A SUSTAINABLE BIENNIAL BUDGET THAT SUPPORTS THE STATE'S ECONOMIC HEALTH AND ADDRESSES THE MCCLEARY DECISION IN A MANNER THAT LEADS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAINS, IMPROVED TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS, AND INCREASED FOCUS ON STEM.

OUTCOMES: 

SPENDING AND SUSTAINABILITY: The 2015-17 biennial budget includes \$38.2 billion in total spending, an unprecedented increase of \$4.4 billion over the previous biennium. It includes a modest revenue package, but avoids large-scale or broad-based tax increases that may have dampened or undermined economic growth.

MCCLEARY SOLUTION: The 2015-17 budget includes \$1.3 billion to address the Supreme Court's McCleary decision regarding K-12 funding. That money will support class-size reduction, expand full-day kindergarten statewide, and fully fund local operating costs related to basic education. In addition to the I-732 voter approved cost of living adjustment, which was fully funded, the budget includes \$153 million for a temporary two-year salary increase for educators. All told, the portion of state operating spending dedicated to K-12 has increased from 38.9 percent a decade ago (during the 2005-07 biennium) to 47.5 percent in 2015-17.

2015 POLICY PRIORITY:

PRIORITIZE INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND INCREASE CAPACITY AT THE STATE'S POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON HIGH-DEMAND STEM DEGREES.

OUTCOMES: 

State lawmakers increased funding for higher education by \$427 million as compared to the 2013-15 biennium, maintaining the share of the budget that goes to higher education while also enabling the state to reduce resident undergraduate tuition at the two- and four-year institutions. The budget provides additional money for high-demand STEM programs, including an expansion of computer science enrollment at the University of Washington and expansion of Washington State University's computer science, electrical and software engineering programs.

2015 POLICY PRIORITY:

INVEST IN THE PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE OF WASHINGTON'S ROADS AND BRIDGES AND COMPLETE IMPROVEMENTS IN KEY TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS.

OUTCOMES: 

After years of work, lawmakers delivered the first comprehensive transportation package and reform package in a decade. The package includes more than \$1.3 billion for preservation and maintenance, which will enable the state to take better care of its existing roads and bridges. It provides \$8.8 billion for project construction, making key investments and finishing projects in important economic corridors such as SR 520, the Puget Sound Gateway (Highways 167 and 509), the North-South Freeway (US 395), and the I-90 expansion over Snoqualmie Pass. It also provides \$445 million in direct distributions to cities and counties for local projects.

This package will yield benefits for decades to come. It will provide for a safer, more efficient, integrated transportation system. It stands to deliver tens of billions of dollars in value through economic growth over the coming decades. It will generate and protect thousands of jobs and support significant expansion of commerce and trade. This is a great package for all of Washington.

2015 POLICY PRIORITY:

ENCOURAGE JOB GROWTH AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.

OUTCOMES: 

As a top state for private sector job growth, Washington led the nation out of recession. Lawmakers were mindful this year not to take steps that would hamper growth. The Roundtable applauds them for education and transportation investments that will lead to better opportunities and support continued economic vitality and quality of life throughout Washington state.

The Washington Roundtable is a nonprofit public policy organization comprised of senior executives of major private sector employers across Washington State.

Since 1983, the Roundtable has worked to create positive change on critical policy issues that foster economic growth, generate jobs and improve quality of life for Washingtonians.

Areas of focus include: economic climate, infrastructure and education.



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