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## WASHINGTON

# For working people, best legislative session in years

For the first time in five years, Democrats were in charge of both chambers of the Washington Legislature, holding narrow majorities in both the Senate and House. As a result, union-backed bills that were blocked when Republicans ran the state Senate had a fighting chance in the 2018 legislative session, which began Jan. 8 and ended March 8. Among bills backed by the state's labor organizations, here are some highlights:

### BILLS THAT PASSED

- **Jobs in capital construction** Lawmakers approved \$4.2 billion in capital construction spending, including schools, mental health facilities and other infrastructure projects that will employ workers in the building trades.
- **School funding** After years of delay, lawmakers approved more than \$776 million for school employee salary increases to satisfy a 2012 state supreme court ruling that found the legislature had failed to adequately fund K-12 schools in accord with a voter mandate.
- **Justice for Hanford workers** For years, workers exposed to radiation at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation failed to get workers compensation benefits if they couldn't show that their cancer or respiratory illness was caused by radiation, which can be tricky to prove. From now on, the state will presume that a set of illnesses contracted by clean-up workers at Hanford are occupational in nature.
- **A step toward equal pay for women** A new law prohibits nondisclosure agreements that forbid discussion of wages, and bars employers from retaliating against employees for asking about their wages or the salary of



other employees. It also prohibits discrimination in career advancement opportunities based on gender. The House passed a version of this four years in a row; now, with the Democrats in charge of the Senate, it's law.

- **Ban the box** Washington is now the 11th state to prohibit questions about criminal record at the first stage of an employment application. Under the new law, employers must also give applicants a chance to present their qualifications for the job before running criminal background checks and inquiring about their conviction records.
- **Privatized homecare overseer** Unions for privatization? Sounds strange, but there are times when it makes sense. In Washington, SEIU Local 775 represents about 37,000 homecare workers who are paid by Medicaid to care for the disabled and elderly in their homes. Though they're hired by the people they serve, the state has been their employer of record for the purposes of collectively bargaining improvements. Now, under a

new law, the state Department of Social and Health Services will contract with a private entity to manage the homecare workforce. That would make it possible in the future for the homecare bargaining unit to once again become a union shop, where all workers contribute to the union's costs, as was the case before 2014. That was the year, in the case *Harris v. Quinn*, that an anti-union 5-4 majority of the U.S. Supreme Court issued an "right-to-work" decision saying that state-paid homecare workers can't be required to pay union fees because they have too tenuous a connection with the state.

### BILLS THAT FAILED

- **Carbon tax** Governor Jay Inslee pushed hard for a \$20 per ton carbon tax to curb greenhouse gas emissions and generate \$800 million a year for investments in renewable energy and conservation. The Senate chopped that in half, but even then it died without a vote on the Senate floor.
- **Capital gains tax** Tax the rich, anyone? House Democrats proposed a 7 percent tax on earnings from the sale of stocks, bonds and other assets above \$25,000 for individuals and \$50,000 for those who file jointly. But the bill never got a vote before the full House, much less the Senate.
- **Accountability in outsourcing** A bill backed by the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE-AFSCME) would have required state agencies to analyze costs, itemize performance standards and document decision-making before contracting out work historically provided by public employees. Isn't it curious: This bill passed the House 69-28 in 2017 when lawmakers knew the Senate would kill it. Now that it could actually pass, it didn't even make it out of its House committee.

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