

Legislative Liaison Final Report

2013-2014

Matthew Bobbink

~

This report is a compilation and summary of the work, accomplishments, shortcomings, and activities of my time in the 2014 legislative session as the Western Washington University Associated Students Legislative Liaison. In this document I will detail my experiences as well as the knowledge and skills acquired from my time in this position. As much as possible testimonies will be provided, yet will be lacking in the large number of impromptu testimonies given on the spot in committee hearings and meetings. The vast majority of all presentations by myself and the other Liaisons are available online in the TVW archive.

~



Viking Lobby Day 2014



Testimonies

HB 1278:

Chair Hunt, Members of the Committee, thank you for your time and consideration. For the record my name is Matthew Bobbink and I am here representing the almost 15,000 students of WWU as well as students all across the state as a representative of the WSA. The students of Washington States Higher education institutions are here before you today to speak in favor of this bill and what it sets to accomplish. As students we represent a very diverse statewide demographic that has faced the issue of low representation and turnout in Washington elections. We consider it a worthy attainable goal to increase voter involvement in our state. Washington has one of the most modern and forward thinking voting systems in the country, yet our turnout rates do not always reflect this. Washington State has expressed a commitment to creating an accessible and convenient electoral system. This bill furthers that goal of accessibility. The state currently reimburses counties at a prorated rate for state primaries and general elections held in odd numbered years when state officers or measures are voted upon as well as primary or vacancy elections held to fill a US senate or representative seat. Expanding this current program to include the much more popular even year elections is a positive step to increasing voter turnout, thus more accurately representing Washingtonians. The students of Washington State stand together to say it is the duty of an active and responsible government to remove any barrier, impediment, or deterrent to the right and responsibility of every eligible citizen, which is to vote. We urge you to support this bill to better our voting system.

HB 1279:

Chair Hunt, members of the committee. Thank you for your time and consideration of this topic. My name is Matthew Bobbink and I represent the almost 15,000 students of Western Washington University as well as students across the state as a representative with the Washington Student Association. As students of our states higher education institutions we greatly value our ability to contribute our voices through our civic duty, namely voting. This bill, if enacted, would help to fill a gap in our voter registrations. 70% of Washingtonians register to vote through the Department of Licensing, because of this staggeringly large majority we must take into account who it is utilizing the convenient and efficient system in place at our states DOLs. Generally youth visit the DOL at two points, once when they are receiving their driver's license, which occurs at 16-17, and once when they turn 21 to renew their license. This of course leaves out those that are old enough to register to vote. By enacting this program you would be insuring that all age ranges are being efficiently processed and served equally and our fellow citizens who are now old enough to vote are not skipped over by the system that Washingtonians overwhelmingly utilize when registering to vote. In Washington we have in place a program allowing 17 year olds to register to vote if they will turn 18 by the next election. This bill would simply implement a more modern and efficient version of what that former program aimed to achieve. It has been shown that voting is a matter of habit and the earlier that habit is instilled the more likely it is to be continued throughout that individual's life. By beginning that feeling of civic engagement at an early age we are instilling the sense of civic duty we

hold so highly that will continue throughout these young peoples lives, thus ensuring a more broad and represented voting public for the future. This program also has precedent and is currently practiced in 8 states including the District of Columbia and has shown to be highly effective. As students, citizens, and voting constituents we strongly support this bill and ask that you merely allow us access to the same system and convenience that the vast majority of this states voting public utilizes. Thank you for your time and consideration, at the committees request I will take any questions and provide any information or assistance I can.

HB 1267:

Madam Chair, members of the committee thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. For the record my name is Matthew Bobbink and I am here to speak on behalf of the more then 15,000 students of Western Washington University as well as students from all of the public 4-year universities as a representative of the Washington Student Association. The students of Washington stand in full support of this bill. The efficiencies and benefits this bill aims to accomplish will be felt by all constituents of the state, including students, and help our auditors make our voter registration system more effective. This bill to us is about government efficiency and a streamline, easily understandable and sensible set of registration deadlines that will reduce confusion and increase voter registration accessibility. Students also care about this bill because of the short time period in which students who live on campus or move for school have to register to vote from the start of classes to the current deadline. By moving the online registration deadline it provides us with much needed time to insure that students have fair and ample opportunity to register at their newly assigned dorm address or their off campus housing. As it stands there is about two weeks between the start of classes in the fall and the registration deadline. Additionally as we move forward and technology becomes more ingrained in our every day life, it simply makes sense that we would put increased energy and focus into the form of registration that is being most utilized, which is online or digital registrations. It also makes sense for these deadlines to fall on the same dates so as to not increase confusion as to when and how a voting citizen of the state is able to register at any given time, dependent on where the deadlines fall. We also should be making the intelligent and simple adjustment to prevent our mail in deadline from falling on a holiday, thus relieving confusion on constituents and pressure on auditors. We as the students are proud to stand with the auditors and the Secretary of State to support intelligent and efficient changes to our registration system and help to improve Washington's electoral system. Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions or provide any information or details at the request of the committee.

Interim Work Session:

Chair Seaquist and members of the committee, thank you for this time. For the record my name is Matthew Bobbink and I represent the students of WWU as well as the WSA. Something that we think is vitally important and we shall be working on in the coming interim will be looking at how we can improve support for students through academic advising and mentorship. These advising services play a very important role in helping students effectively navigate their way to their degree. It should be noted that most students are not graduating in 4 years, and academic advising is an important factor in the

time period it takes for student to reach completion of their time at university. By helping students find the classes they need and insuring that unnecessary classes are not taken through lack of guidance we can help students reach their degrees more quickly. Academic advising should be targeted at areas of key transition as well. For example it would be a positive move to increase advising support in the transition from High School to either 2-year or 4-year institutions, and from our 2-year institutions into 4-year universities, as well as a critical degree checkpoints. You have taken great steps in rebuilding our institutions from the damage of the recession and we thank you for the great budget that we had last session. We must not forget that a lot of what was cut during the recession was ancillary but vital programs such as advising and mental health services. The mental health services at our institutions are absolutely critical and we must look at increasing support in this area to make sure we are helping our students succeed as best they can and work through hardships with support. Some of our brightest students deal with issues related to mental health. Now another area that we will be looking at is how education and the work force can work together to make sure we are reaching our needed goals of students with high demand degrees. We must make sure we are also balancing the production of students into these high demand degrees while still preserving academic freedom to pursue their interests and passions. We think another important topic is transparency at our institutions and we look forward to working with you and our universities to make sure student and state dollars are being effectively spent in an open and accessible manner without putting unnecessary or costly burdens on our institutions.

Testimony in the House Governmental Operations and Elections committee in favor of (HB 1279) Motor Voter 16-17 year old pre-registration for voting in WA.

http://www.tvw.org/index.php?option=com_tvwplayer&eventID=2014011013#start=1052&stop=1348

Testimony on 1278 for Voter Access which would have ballots have prepaid postage so the cost does not fall on the voter

http://www.tvw.org/scripts/initfs/video.php?eventID=2014011113&start=3743&stop=3743&_p=4037

WWU Dean of Students Ted Pratt's testimony about mental health on campus, services, and the need for increased state support for those services. The student story he provides about a student with mental health issues was my personal story that I had him tell in his testimony.

http://www.tvw.org/index.php?option=com_tvwplayer&eventID=2014020101#start=5101&stop=5678

Many other testimonies were given during my time in Olympia that were impromptu and spared no time for written preparation. Much of the commentary from students would be at the request of the committee or on topics not on the scheduled agenda that would come up in the process of committee.



**Testimony before House Government Operations and Elections
Committee**





Testimony before House Capitol Budget Committee Bills and Legislation

Carver Academic Facility Reconstruction Funding

A huge portion of my work this session was put into discussions around the restructuring and remodeling of Carver Academic Facility. Studies were done by the university that have shown Carver to be highly dangerous and an extreme earthquake hazard. It has been number one on the list of public buildings requiring attention for multiple sessions but was passed over for quite trivial reasons. This year we set out with the faculty and administration to make sure that the legislature knew how important this project is and how negligent it is to not make this building safe. Through our efforts we were able to get \$5 million in the Senate, House, and Governors budgets. The full project cost was estimated to be around \$70 million but this initial investment allows the university to begin the project, preventing a two-year delay. Unfortunately because the legislators were unable to come to a consensus and pass a budget, we received no funding to start the project. Hopefully our prospects for this coming budget session will be stronger but we must keep the pressure high and the conversations continuing.

DREAM Act/ Real Hope Act

The Real Hope Act was our most successful issue during the session. SB 6523 was passed and signed into law by Governor Inslee. For the first time in WSA history, we co-coordinated a statewide state-wide issue campaign, teaming up with One America and the Washington Dream Act Coalition. We also worked closely with the Latino/Latina Education Achievement Project (LEAP) who worked diligently to convince Barbara Bailey to pass the

bill through committee. As was expected, this issue was particularly controversial, especially in the early parts of the session. It quickly became wrapped up in politics and was divided along party lines. Several legislators played critical roles in getting this bill passed starting with Frank Chopp. He classified this issue as important to him personally and pressed and succeeded in getting the bill passed through the house on the first day of session. Zach Hudgins and Barbara Bailey also played critical roles in the house and senate respectively as well.

Bills of Note: SB 6523 and HB 1817

Legislators of note: Rep. Zach Hudgens, Rep. Frank Chopp, Sen. Barbara Bailey

Affordability

Entering into this school year, extending the statewide tuition freeze for undergraduates, which was guaranteed for the 2013-2014 school year but not the 2014-2015 school year, was a top priority for students. We also attempted to obtain more funding for numerous aid programs such as the college bound scholarship and the state need grant. As part of the Real Hope Act, we were able to secure an additional \$5 million investment into the state need grant. We were also able to successfully secure a statewide tuition freeze for undergraduates through the 2014-2015 school year, however the funding to universities as a whole did not improve. The 2014 supplemental budget can and should be seen as a cut to universities. Going into next session we need to prepare to push hard for additional investments in our universities. Without serious increases in state funding, it is unlikely that we will see continued tuition freezes through the next biennium.

Representative Pollet and Senator Baumgartner are currently trying to come up with a uniform standard in determining what "affordable" higher education truly is. Both of them are looking at a figure of 10% of median family income. Students have not taken a stance on this figure and we aren't sure if this is the best number, but it shows that we are on the way toward determining what "affordable" tuition looks like.

Bills of Note: SB 6002 and SB 6523

Legislators of Note: Rep. Seaquist, Rep. Pollet, Sen. Baumgartner

Veterans In-state Tuition

Another one of our priorities this year was removing the one year waiting period for veterans to receive in-state tuition. Barbara Bailey and the senate majority coalition caucus made it their top priority issue for this session. As a result, the issue became entangled with the DREAM act. Even after the passage of the Dream Act this bill was in jeopardy, fortunately the log jam was finally broken with a bit of media attention and pressure from students. We also worked on SB 5969 which would allow the awarding of academic credit for military service. It moved easily through the legislative process and was also successfully passed. On the matter of how credit will be distributed, each university will decide on their own what credit will be granted for depending upon the military experiences of the individuals.

Bills of Note: SB 5318 and SB 5969

Legislators of Note: Sen. Bailey

Voter Access

Voter access was WSA's final priority issue for this session. Specifically, the two issues that we worked on was motor voter registration for those between the ages of 16 and 18, and a bill that would adjust the voter registration deadline to allow for voter registrations closer to election time. Heading into the session, the efforts to adjust the voter

registration deadline had received support from the Secretary of State's office, the county auditors, and members of the republican and democratic caucuses. As it was introduced to the legislature, the bill moved easily through the house, but ended up dying in the senate government operations and elections committee. It's important to note that it did have the votes to pass it out of committee in the Senate. The reason this bill didn't progress is probably political and likely the result of efforts by Pam Roach and Don Benton, both of whom are the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

The Motor Voter pre-registration bill did not have as much support as the extension of the voter registration deadline. The Secretary of State and the county auditors were not supportive of this legislation. This bill also went through the house pretty easily, and again, died in Senate Government Operations. The big concerns that the Secretary of State and the county auditors had in terms of this piece of legislation was mostly in regards to the outdated technology in the counties around the state and their ability to prevent underage individuals from entering onto the voter rolls. We will be working with the county auditors to try and address these concerns in the interim, but should not let these concerns dissuade us from pursuing this policy change.

Bills of Note: 1267 and 1279

Legislators of Note: Rep. Hunt, Rep. Bergquist

Differential Tuition

This issue in particular is one that students have been trying to deal with for a long time. In this year's session, we found some success, but didn't make any gains. Although this bill passed with broad support in the house, passing nearly unanimously, once it got to the senate it stagnated. The reasoning for this is unclear. Many Democrats in the Senate did not support the repealing of differential tuition until we had discussions with them about it. Our best guess is that Barbara Bailey may be holding the issue up. Senator Kevin Ranker has shown a particular interest in helping students in repealing differential tuition. It is important to note that his approach would be very aggressive and likely partisan.

Bills of Note: HB 1043

Legislators of Note: Rep. Pollet, Sen. Ranker

Pay It Forward

The Washington Student Association has been working very closely with the Economic Opportunity Institute on the issue of Pay It Forward. Overall, we see this program as being potentially beneficial in terms of increasing access to higher education, but not as an effective way to address affordability. It is clear that our General Assembly and Board of Directors have opted to take a very cautious approach on this issue, which at times, made it very difficult for the liaisons to effectively work on bills that were in play. At the start of session we worked on a bill with Representative Stonier, primarily with Washington State University-Vancouver. While it originally started off as a pay it forward program, it eventually transitioned into an income based repayment loan. The Bill seemed to have good support in the house higher education committee, but it eventually died in appropriations due to the fiscal note. The second Pay it Forward bill that was brought forth was submitted by Representative Bergquist. This would have created the state need pay it forward program. In essence, it would replace the state need grant with the Pay It Forward system. This was the one bill during session students decided to actively oppose. The reason why we opposed the bill was because eliminating the state need grant would

effectively raise tuition for over 70,000 students in Washington. The final pay it forward bill was created by Representative Seaquist. This bill would have targeted high school students rather than creating a pilot program in a particular department at a specific university.

Bills of Note: HB 2619, HB 2429, and HB 2720

Legislators of Note: Rep. Stonier, Rep. Seaquist, Rep. Bergquist

Dedicated Revenue

Our efforts on dedicated revenue were primarily aimed at removing the R&D tax credit for our high tech businesses, and place that money into high demand STEM degrees. Unfortunately we were never able to gain any traction on this particular issue. As this was not a budget year, there was little interest in working on the issue of dedicated revenue. It is important to note that dedicated revenue is a fairly political issue and one that Democrats are a little apprehensive about committing to.

Bills of Note: HB 1303

Legislators of Note:

Transportation

From the very start of session, the issue of transportation didn't seem to be going anywhere. Toward the midway point of session, the majority coalition caucus released a transportation bill that was poorly received and generally regarded as not being a serious attempt to move this issue forward.

Bills of Note: None

Legislators of Note: None

Key Transition Points

This issue didn't get a lot of traction this session but it will be a critical issue for the next couple of years. There were a couple of bills that were loosely related to this issue, but nothing substantial. WSA needs to work on a developing a clear plan during the interim to strengthen these transition points.

Bills of Note: HB 2400

Legislators of Note: None

Textbooks/Classroom Materials

Before the session started, Marcus Riccelli approached us with a bill that would create a tax holiday for textbooks and classroom materials. We ended up running into a large amount of opposition from the Democratic party in particular. The bill ended up not passing out of the House Higher Education Committee. Due to the political opposition and the fiscal note that was attached to the bill, creating a tax holiday is not a practical solution toward making textbooks and classroom materials more affordable. Representative Seaquist, specifically asked us to work on this issue during the interim. The WSA should also work with the Council of Faculty Representatives and COP in the interim to identify issues that the students run into around textbooks and classroom materials and how we can address those problems.

Bills of Note: 2640

Legislators of Note: Rep. Riccelli, Rep. Seaquist, Rep. Reykdal

Transparency

Students have been working with Representative Zeiger on a bill that would require universities to post their academic departmental budgets online. This bill ended up with a fiscal note of \$5 million, which created a situation where the bill wasn't very practical. An

amendment was added to the bill that would shift the reporting requirement to the college level rather than departmental. This amendment significantly reduced the fiscal note and made it more likely to pass but unfortunately it never experienced any meaningful movement once reaching the Senate. Though there was a bit of excitement on Sine Die when it was accidentally passed out of Ways and Means and sent to the floor. The WSA should plan to work with Representative Zeiger and the COP in the interim to identify language for a bill that we could introduce in the 2015 session.

Bills of Note: 2336

Legislators of Note: Rep. Zeiger

Efficiency

Every year the COP and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges create a bill that identifies inefficiencies and redundancies within the higher education system. This year the WSA chose to endorse the bill and we worked closely with the COP to push it through. While there was a little drama early on with this bill, it eventually passed without much trouble.

Bills of Note: HB 2613 and SB 6362

Legislators of Note:

Inmate post-secondary degree program

At the January Board meeting, the WSA endorsed a policy that would allow for public funds to go towards supporting inmate post-secondary degree programs. We felt like this was an important bill to support in terms of accessibility towards higher education. This bill moved through the house fairly easily, but ultimately died in the Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee. The WSA should consider working on this bill next year and try and see if we can get a companion bill in the Senate. Also, we should work to ensure that this bill is referred to higher education committees.

Bills of Note: HB 2486 and SB 6344

Legislators of Note:

Social Impact Bonds

This is an interesting and innovative idea that we have been working with Representative Zeiger on. Unfortunately, this bill did not get much traction. While it fairly easily passed out of the house higher education committee, it quickly died in house appropriations. Representative Ross Hunter seems to be strongly opposed to the policy. We should consider working on a senate version of the bill next year and stay in touch with Representative Zeiger in the interim.

Bills of Note: HB 2337

Legislators of Note: Rep. Zeiger and Rep. Hunter