

# County and City Employee

WASHINGTON STATE COUNCIL OF COUNTY AND CITY EMPLOYEES — AFSCME AFL-CIO



Matt Wilson

## He hasn't forgotten those WORDS OF WISDOM

Shortly before he died, Matt Wilson's grandfather, Wayne Phillips, told him why his working life had improved over the years. Wilson has never forgotten the conversation.

"I am really pleased that our union worked so hard for us and was able to build a decent work week and to see that we were paid good wages," Phillips — who worked as a miner at the northern Idaho Sunshine silver mine for 20 years — told him.

Wilson vowed then to support a union wherever he worked and to do all he could to see that the benefits enjoyed by his grandfather and his father, who also worked at the mine, were never lost.

After high school, Wilson attended Whitworth College in Spokane before returning to Idaho to work as an apprentice electrician in the mining industry for 10 years. In 2005 he

*This is another in a series of articles highlighting Council 2 members and the services they perform.*

moved to Washington State where he found work as a maintenance technician with the City of Bellingham, a position he still occupies.

He was so eager to become involved in Council 2's Local 114, which represents the City employees, that he volunteered to take over as shop steward when the person holding the position retired. But he was told he would have to wait because he was still on probation. Soon, however, Wilson was serving in the position, which he held for four years.

For the last two years he has been

president of the 400-member Local.

Staff Representative Vinnie O'Connor says Wilson is a dedicated leader who regularly shows up on his days off to help with union affairs.

"He is a very hard worker and has taken on a number of projects, including recently the design of a logo for t-shirts for the Local.

"He orchestrated the annual members' picnic. He also was the Local organizer assisting the recently elected mayor Kelli Linville in her campaign. He thought she would be fair to workers as well as being a good leader."

O'Connor adds that Wilson is the kind of person who always asks how he can help in any projects that are being undertaken.

Wilson says that his grandfather's words still come back to him when

See WILSON, page 2

## Workers seek union security

Fear of budget cuts, staff reductions, increasing furloughs and possible layoffs are continuing to drive non-unionized local government workers in Washington State to join Council 2.

It is not always an easy path. Management is often resistant to the formation of a union and tries to find ways to block it, slowing down the process. But, assisted by Council 2, the workers eventually prevail and are added to the union ranks.

In recent months, 140 such workers in three districts have joined Council 2. Here are their stories.

### City of Arlington

Early last year 60 City of Arlington employees realized that they had no union protection in the face of threatening budget cuts, although workers in the police and fire departments did. So they contacted Council 2.

See ORGANIZING, Page 3

## Budget cuts still loom large

The big budget cuts — the ones that will have the strongest impact on local government employees — still lie ahead.

The State Legislature, halfway through its 60-day regular session, has so far done little to eliminate the \$2 billion budget shortfall it faces. The 30-day special session during December failed to tackle it effectively, achieving only \$480 million in cuts. The other 75 percent of the budget will be the toughest to tackle.

"They will probably leave the heavy lifting to the end of the session," predicts Council 2 Deputy

See BUDGET, Page 3

# How's this for new revenue, legislature?

CHRIS DUGOVICH

Times have been tough for the past three years in the public sector, in the better than 280 local government jurisdictions across the state wage freezes and cuts, medical insurance that does not cover like it used to and costs more and layoffs are certainly the norm. Very few jurisdictions have raised any revenue via tax increases and due to the constant no-tax mantra a good percentage have cut taxes.



*Letter from the President*

Surprisingly there is one place that starting in 2012 will enjoy a fourfold increase. By some estimates income will go from about \$6 million a year to better than \$20 million. These dollars will flow into one of the hardest hits areas of our state budget and arguably one of the most worthy, higher education. It will go into UW and WSU coffers.

Now before I go any further, I'm a diehard football fan who spends quite a bit of my off time in the fall rooting for UW and WSU. Football is important. But there needs to be some balance and restraints placed on how this new PAC 12 television money is used.

Reported by the Associated Press, the new 12-year Pacific Athletic Conference, PAC 12 TV, deal is worth up to \$250 million a year or maybe \$3 billion over its life. It is evenly split between PAC 12 schools.

What did UW and WSU do with these dollars during this worse economic downturn in this country since the depression? Offset any portion of the academic cuts? Offset the 26% increase in college tuition in 2011/2012? Fund more slots for students? Heck no, they spent a big chunk on new coaches.

I've spent a career making sure public employees are compensated fairly, but are these numbers really justifiable and necessary to attract the best talent?

WSU gives \$2.25 million to Rick Leach and the Huskies fire their \$750,000-a-year defensive coordinator whom they lured with zeros away from USC several years ago and replaced him and his assistants with a better paid bunch. The new UW defensive coordinator starts this year at \$750,000 that escalates to \$850,000 a year over the three years and it is all guaranteed. The offensive coordinator is probably upset, he received only \$375,000 this year that escalates to \$425,000 in three years and of course it is guaranteed. Keeping in mind Head UW Coach Sarkisian will make the same \$2.25 million a year that Leach does at Pullman.

For many of the new UW coaching crowd these were sizable increases that their previous employers like California stated they tried to match but were unable to due to financial restraints!

UW Athletic Director Scott Woodward in a statement said they need to be competitive and that it was a prudent investment of the

See PRESIDENT, Page 3

# Bill targets wrong problem

It can be called ballooning of pension benefits.

Here's how it happens. A few years before some higher paid management employees retire, they assign themselves as much overtime as they can, boosting their annual incomes for those years above their normal compensation and thereby increasing the amount on which their pension payouts are based.

In other cases, employees will save up unused annual leave over the last few years before their retirement, receiving a cash-out payment for that leave when they retire and thereby boosting the amount on which their pension is based.

"The problem is that if the last five years of compensation is drastically different from the previous 25 years you have not paid in to receive that full benefit and your employer has not paid in for you to receive that benefit," explains Council 2 Deputy Director Pat Thompson.

"The result is that other members will have to pay for your increased pension benefits."

On the other hand, if you cannot count overtime toward your pension benefits it means that those employees who have regularly worked overtime over their years of service will receive lower pension benefits than they deserve, Thompson

adds.

Now a bill before the State Legislature, Senate Bill 6543, would mean that pension benefits received from overtime would be excluded from your retirement.

Worse yet, the bill excludes any such penalty for management employees because they have their overtime hours rolled into their regular hours.

"Call up your legislators to tell them to vote against this bill," Thompson says.

"The message is: Why are you penalizing the hourly employees while management employees will still be able to include their overtime in their pension benefits?"

## Benefits of health care act outlined

One of the better things that has happened in the last three years is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, says AFSCME's Director of Collective Bargaining and Health Care Policy Steve Kreisberg.

Addressing Council 2 members at a workshop at the Legislative Weekend, he outlined improvements provided by the measure, some that have already taken place and others that will be phased in. Among them:

- Greater access to benefits.
- Elimination of lifetime and annual dollar

limits on coverage.

- Elimination of more coverage gaps.
- No exclusions because of pre-existing conditions for children and adults
- A provision that health insurance companies must spend 80 cents of every premium dollar on medical claims for groups less than 50 and 85 cents of every premium dollar on medical claims in larger group plans. Should they spend less, the difference must be refunded to those who pay the insurance premiums.

### WILSON, from Page 1

he sees the threats that are emerging to the rights for which his grandfather's generation worked.

"We are taking for granted those things that an earlier generation fought so hard to gain for us: good working conditions, health care and decent wages," Wilson says.

"Not only are we taking them for granted, but those gains are starting to erode. We watch as the health care deduction is reduced and threats to collective bargaining emerge from states such as Wisconsin."

But he sees a bright side to the recent threats to collective bargaining and other union rights. The reason: They serve as a wake-up call to union members.

"In some ways it is the best thing that could have happened to us as we have been called out. A sleeping giant has been called awake."

Wilson recently led bargaining for a new contract, which he says is a good one.

"The challenge is to let members know that they might not have got all they wanted in terms of additions to the cost of living allowances, but in today's climate some things are more important, such as maintaining the benefits and job security we do have."

Adds staff representative O'Connor, "When he is at the bargaining table his focus has been on what's best for the members, what's best for everybody, not just him or his group.

"And he never complains."

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# We must find revenue, Sells tells Council 2

The state has to go wherever it can to find revenue to help balance the budget, says State Representative Michael Sells, who represents the 38th legislative district (Everett, Marysville and Tulalip).

"I am sure you can always find fraud and waste," Sells told Council 2 members who attended the Legislative Weekend in Olympia in late January. "But we can only save so much doing that. We need to raise revenue. The question is: How do we do that?"

Sells explained that initiative 1053 that was passed in 2010 requires a two-thirds majority of both houses of the

Legislature to raise revenue.

"Therefore, 17 of the 148 members can stop any revenue increases," he said.

"My view is we have to go wherever we can because we must raise revenue. It seems like we have to do something with the sales tax.

"So far, you people seem to be holding your own, although I know there have been furloughs and lost jobs.

"I am going to fight for revenue to offset cuts and see that they don't mess with collective bargaining.

"This is not going to be Wisconsin."



State Rep. Michael Sells speaks at the Legislative Weekend

## OUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Here are Council 2's priorities for the legislative session.

- Balance budget cuts with increased revenue
- ✓ Close the tax breaks that have not created the jobs they promised
- ✓ Increase general revenue
- ✓ Do not cut revenue to local government for state-mandated services (the Legislature has passed numerous laws, particularly criminal justice laws, that require local government funding)
  - Give Local governments more flexibility to meet its needs
  - ✓ Ease restrictions on how local government can raise and spend its own revenue based on community needs
- Fund, don't blame the pension system
  - ✓ Washington State's pension system is one of the healthiest in the country. Any shortfalls are due to the legislator's purposeful under-funding.

## PRESIDENT, from Page 1

additional money from the PAC 12 TV deal.

Oh yeah, we hear those statements all the time at a public sector bargaining table when a salary as reported went from \$164,000 at CAL to \$375,000 at UW. My opinion is these guys would work for less, much less, but who can blame them? I'm sure they are excellent coaches and individuals and why not take the dough when it is being thrown at you?

The real hero is PAC 12 commissioner Larry Scott who beat up ESPN and the FOX Network to fork over the \$3 billion to televise the PAC 12 games. Now what we need to do is get Larry to negotiate the salaries with the coaches so there is something left over for the real job of these universities — educating our kids!

It is a system gone way too far and until there is some real oversight by our State Legislature or other officials the athletic coaches will be multi-millionaires while our kids' tuition escalates. And that's only if there is space for them to attend.

The scary part for us may be the hit the rest of us in the public sector take if individuals start to confuse these coaches, their salaries and the process in which they received them as anywhere near the reality in the rest of the public sector. Let's hope not!

## BUDGET, from Page 1

Director Pat Thompson.

"There are likely to be devastating cuts to the services that the state provides. The cuts will be greater at the state level than the local government level. But they will come.

"Funds will be reduced for the services that our members provide, including painful eliminations of social and health services and education.

"There is no good news. It is just a question of

how bad it will be."

Democrats are looking to avoid drastic cuts by closing tax loopholes that have not delivered jobs as promised and seeking half-a-cent increase in the sales tax.

Most Republicans prefer an all-cuts budget that they believe will create efficiencies not found in the last four years of budget cuts. Among these are contracting out public-sector jobs, cutting

wages and benefit to public-sector workers and eliminating public-sector pension rights.

"Whatever the final outcome, it won't be good," Thompson says. "The reality of our nation's financial problems hits government later than the private sector. Even when the general economic news appears better, little in the budget news seems positive."

## ORGANIZING, From Page 1

Hearing of the effort to organize the workers, management created a group called the Employee Representative Board to discuss employee issues with the city. The problem was that the board consisted not only of some hourly workers, but also of managers and supervisors.

When Council 2 filed a petition to organize the workers, management asserted that the workers were already represented by the Employee Representative Board. But Council 2 pointed out that the board did not fulfill the requirements of a bargaining unit as set out by the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) as managers and supervisors were included in it.

"We filed to organize only the non-supervisory employees," says Council 2 Director of Organizing Bill Keenan. "But the City insisted it would not allow the group to be broken up."

A pre-election telephone conference was set up to determine whether the issue could be decided without a PERC hearing. But the discussion was unsuccessful at resolving the issue and a date was set for a PERC hearing.

"Before the hearing was held, however, the City withdrew their position and agreed to our bargaining unit," Keenan says.

The election was held in December. Workers voted 2-to-1 to join Council 2.

"They were upset with the City's tactics and the election saw a 90 percent turnout," Keenan says.

The first general membership meeting of the new local 2010 was held in the first week of February at which a bargaining committee was formed, the local's constitution is being drawn up, and preparation is being made for the election of new officers. The City has requested that the issue of furloughs be one of the first bargaining issues.

## Pierce County

After a two-year struggle, 55 maintenance workers at Pierce County's Wastewater Treatment Plant have joined Council 2.

The application to join the union came first from 11 maintenance workers in the treatment plant.

"In order to thwart our attempt, the County claimed that another 40 workers — who do a different kind of work — should be part of the bargaining unit," Keenan says. "We filed an application for a unit clarification and the issue went to PERC. The commission ruled that the 55 workers should be one group."

An election was held in December and the 55 workers voted overwhelmingly to join the union.

The new members will be part of Local 120-G, the general government union of Pierce County.

Keenan pays tribute to Todd Carlson, now shop steward for the treatment plant, for his work in getting the workers organized.

"He was not only instrumental in organizing the original group of 11 workers, but also worked among the other 44," he says. "He put a tremendous amount of work into it and was like a one-man organizing campaign."

## King County Superior Court

Concerned about their future in a world of reduced state funding, layoffs and staff reductions, 15 CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) program specialists and attorneys and five court coordinators sought some two years ago to become members of Council 2.

The union felt the two groups should be part of an existing bargaining unit of Juvenile Court Probation Counselors and Support Staff, but the court disagreed, saying that they should be two separate units.

After a number of hearings, PERC included the Court Coordinators in the existing Local 2084-SC bargaining unit, but declared that the CASA group should be a separate unit.

Both groups are now represented by Council 2 and are working on contract language.

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# A CAPITOL VISIT

Council 2's Legislative Weekend was held in Olympia in late January. Attendees toured the Washington State Capitol building, spoke with legislators, attended a workshop and committee meetings, heard a talk from a state representative, and received an update on the legislative session.



Council 2 visitors to the Washington State Capitol during the union's recent Legislative Weekend pose on the rotunda steps.



During the visit to the State Capitol, some members met with their legislative representatives. Here Local 2084-SC President Michael West, center, and Treasurer Ron Tarnow, left, both juvenile probation counselors at the King County Superior Court, urge Eric Pettigrew, State Representative for the 37th district, to do what he can to stop budget cuts to the juvenile court system. The court is based in Pettigrew's district.



A tour guide points out a feature in the House of Representatives at the Washington State Capitol as Council 2 members look on. Two groups of Council 2 members were guided through the building where they not only viewed the building's impressive architecture, but also learned how the legislative system works and gained an insight into the state's history.