

Airport Lobbying

By Paul Butler

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A few weeks ago I was with the family waiting for our baggage to appear on the rotating carousel at Boston Logan Airport when I noticed standing next to us, with a small entourage, was none other than our governor, Chris Gregoire. She had been on the same flight that day from Seattle.

Curious, I asked someone in her group what had brought the governor to Boston. After the requisite up and down look over, the aide replied Gregoire was there for the annual National Governor's Association meeting. I thought of asking for a word with the governor, maybe a photo op with the kids, but Gregoire looked busy with her cell phone and no one seemed that friendly.

Our bag came and we left. I read about the conference and the stories were predictable: A big election year (37 governor races) and most states are hurting financially, hoping Uncle Sam can come to the rescue in one way or another. (In Washington State's case, there is \$480 million in federal Medicaid bailout money on the table.)

In retrospect, I wish I had a chance to speak to my fellow passenger and leader of our state. What, of all possible things would I have said?

Mainly, I would have told her, despite this state's budget woes, not to eliminate or suspend funding for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. This 30-year successful program was highlighted in June by the committee on Transforming Washington's Budget as the kind of program that could be put on the chopping block.

What a mistake this would be come next summer if the governor signs the 2011-2013 budget without the full \$100 million in WWRP funding. The reasons this program has been wildly successful are too numerous to list here, but the short of it is that the WWRP ensures quality of life, habitat restoration, recreation opportunities and quality investments for future generations, while leveraging federal dollars to maximize the return.

The program, relatively speaking, costs a pittance considering what it provides. Recently, Gregoire said, "As difficult as the past two legislative sessions have been, the 2011 session will be even more challenging as the economy is still

recovering. Forty-six states have faced – or still face – budget deficits, so we know that Washington is not unique in adapting to an uncertain economy. But we can make Washington unique by how we construct our next budget.”

That construction should include continued support for the WWRP – a unique, successful and effective use of taxpayers’ money.

– Paul Butler