Legislative watch: Triage centers and 4-year universities

Our state leaders are currently contemplating billions of dollars that must be eliminated from state programs, meaning further cuts to local governments tasked with administering state services.

In particular, in Snohomish County, we know state budget cuts will take a toll on our most vulnerable populations in our community. As a result, I have asked my staff to seek new and more cost-effective ways of providing services.

One area we are targeting is an effort to reduce the higher costs we see when our jail and hospital emergency rooms are filled with people in need of alcohol, drug or mental health treatment.

Snohomish County is the originator of bills in the state House and Senate creating triage centers for such cases, an alternative option for law enforcement to place individuals who need treatment rather than an expensive night in jail at taxpayer expense. The outcome is better care and lower costs.

As the first committee deadline approaches this weekend, both triage bills – House Bill 1170 and Senate Bill 5028 – are moving forward. My Human Services Director, Ken Stark, has testified several times on behalf of these bills, and lawmakers have been receptive – passing both bills out of their committees of origin.

In addition, I am keeping a close eye on legislation that would create a new four-year university in Snohomish County. Earlier this week, I signed a joint resolution with the County Council in support of increased higher education opportunities in the Snohomish County region. In the past, I have supported efforts by Sen. Steve Hobbs to advance a four-year polytechnic university bill, and am lending my support to Rep. Mike Sells’ efforts to persuade Washington State University to begin operations in the region.
We need a four-year university in Snohomish County to support our current aerospace and biotech industries as well as to provide a springboard for new business and industry growth in Snohomish County.

As this legislative session progresses, I’ll keep you informed of our efforts and successes in Olympia.

Reardon requests federal assistance for flood repairs

With warmer weather returning, Snohomish County's Public Works Department is still making repairs to roads damaged during floods this past January and December.

But a request from Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon for federal assistance could bring necessary funds to make repairs.

At Executive Reardon's request, Washington's governor recently asked the president to issue a disaster declaration for damage from December's floods.

"These floods caused damage that can be quickly fixed with federal assistance," Reardon said. "Snohomish County isn't alone in its need, and I'm grateful for the steps the governor has taken to help our state's communities."

Such a declaration would free up federal funding for road repairs in Snohomish County, including Reiter Road just east of Gold Bar, and for damage in other counties across the state.

The county has experienced flood and slide damage at more than a dozen key road locations, with repairs expected to cost upwards of $3.5 million.

"Many people assume that once a weather event is over, our work is done, but that’s rarely the case,” Reardon said. “While our crews always rise to the challenge of keeping residents safe during inclement weather and flooding, they continue working diligently to clear debris and make repairs, often in cold and wet conditions.”

Two landslides and collapsed pavement have led to Reiter Roads closure, and repairs are expected to take months and cost more than those services, and the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

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Sincerely,

Aaron Reardon
Another landslide at Waldheim Hill worsened and crews have worked to help residents maintain safe access to their homes.

“When flood waters recede, our public works crews really go to work, clearing debris, stabilizing slopes and repairing damaged roadways,” Reardon said. "This can be months of work and millions of dollars."

Since flooding in December, Public Works’ crews also have responded by taking damaged household goods and building debris.

A fee waiver proposed by Executive Reardon for flood-damaged residential waste has seen the county take in an additional 46 tons of debris. County officials expect to receive as much as 70 tons of debris by the end of the program April 13.

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**Reardon signs contract for new speedway operator**

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon recently signed a contract approving High Road Promotions as the new operator of the Evergreen Speedway, located at the Evergreen State Fairgrounds outside Monroe.

High Road Promotions – owned by Doug Hobbs, a Monroe businessman and Steve Beitler, who owns and operates the Skagit Speedway in Burlington – will manage, promote, market, operate and maintain the motorsports venue at the fairgrounds.

“High Road Promotions has been recognized for its enthusiasm, community commitment, regional approach to motorsports and is respected within the national racing community,” Reardon said. “With their professional assistance, the Evergreen Speedway will prove to be a valuable asset for Snohomish County and the Puget Sound.”

Selected through a competitive process, High Road Promotions has agreed to a 25-year contract to operate the speedway, during which it will complete a variety of capital improvements at the venue. Improvements include upgrading the 3/8-mile track, replacing the sound system and lighting, constructing luxury suites, upgrading restrooms, replacing the track scoreboard and completing a major clean-up and painting of the facilities.

“High Road Promotions is excited to be a part of the incredible racing that has been at the Evergreen Speedway for years,” said Doug Hobbs, a managing partner of High Road Promotions. “We are
looking forward to making improvements that should increase race fans’ experience. We know we have a great partner in Snohomish County and its parks department, which oversees the Evergreen State Fairgrounds where the speedway is located."

The company has said it also plans to expand the variety and number of motorsports at the fairgrounds as well as to promote non-racing events that increase the fairground’s year-round attractions.

On a recent weekend High Road Promotions and more than 40 volunteers from the racing community, using donated power washers and materials, cleaned the grandstand at the venue.

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