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Nixon makes bid to unseat Goodman in house

September 30, 2008

By J.B. Wogan

Goodman wants to focus on education and transportation

At about 5 p.m. Sept. 23, Rep. Roger Goodman, (D-45), was on his way to Carnation, part of a door-knocking diet that began in April: 80-120 homes a day, six days a week.

"I'm learning about what's happening literally in that neighborhood," Goodman said.

Since 2006, Goodman has filled one of two positions for the state House of Representatives for the 45th district, which encompasses the northern end of Sammamish, as well as parts of nine other Eastside cities and unincorporated King County. The primary obligation for representatives like Goodman in odd-numbered years — such as 2009 — to hash out the next two-year budget.

Goodman's top priority is retooling the state budget to more adequately fund public education. In particular, he's in favor of the state's effort to redefine basic education and allocate funds to meet that definition's needs.

"We're not doing well when you look at the numbers," Goodman said. Those numbers are "per pupil expenditure" and teacher pay. Goodman said the state is among the worst in the country for the amount it spends on each student and on teachers' salaries.

While he said he's waiting to see what the state-appointed Basic Education Finance Joint Task Force presents in its December report to the legislature, he has some solutions in mind. One would be to improve early learning education, funding better preschool options.

Another would be to strengthen ties between high schools and local community and technical colleges, allowing students to develop career-specific expertise; he also supports increasing opportunities within those colleges. In both areas, he refers to specific action he's already taken. He helped introduce and pass a senate bill in 2008 that would launch a \$453,000 early learning program.

He also helped pass a bill in 2008 that added an applied science degree to the [Lake Washington Technical College](#) for computer games design. Goodman said he believes the degree will be instrumental in giving local students in his district an edge in a career field important to East King County.

Transportation is also another key issue for the next budget session, according to Goodman. Sammamish needs increased bus service, though perhaps not in its neighborhoods, he said. Between the two improvement plans for the 520 bridge proposed by gubernatorial candidates Dino Rossi and Christine Gregoire, Goodman said he supports Gregoire's. The plan calls for six traffic lanes including two HOV lanes.

"There's no way you can pile eight lanes of general purpose traffic into Montlake," said Goodman. "Dino wasn't fair. That was a tough negotiation. We got a very good deal."

Goodman was one of several house representatives, along with the Washington State Department of Transportation and Gov. Chris Gregoire (D), that helped broker the deal allowing for the state's current 520-bridge plan. To develop the plan, those parties had to seek approval from several interest groups who were at odds with each other, according to Goodman. Neighborhoods on the west side of the 520 bridge were against any expansion at all, making an eight-lane solution all but impossible in Goodman's mind. Goodman also said more lanes would add traffic and cost more.

"How are you going to pay for this?" He asked.

Goodman cautioned that almost any plan for change would be tempered by the realities of economic hardship across the country. The projected budget deficit of \$3.2 billion will likely translate into program and job cuts, he said.

"I hope that early learning and K-12 and higher education will be close to sacrosanct when we cut, because that has to be the very last thing we cut," he said.

If education spending is not cut, another 10-12 percent of the budget would have to be cut, he said. That would probably mean a hiring freeze and some full-time government employees losing their jobs. Goodman said one area ripe for decreases in spending is the state's corrections program. He cited \$400 million spent on state, county and city jails and prisons for each two-year budget cycle. But he said he thought there would be little to no political momentum behind such a cut because criticizing the jail and prison system can be interpreted as being soft on crime.

"It's politicized or sensationalized, the soft on crime label. We're not being smart on crime. We're wasting our money and I think the people know that," Goodman said.

Nixon would cut back programs and pay for increased education

It's been six years since Toby Nixon challenged an incumbent for a seat in the state's House of Representatives. In 2002, he started a four-year tenure that ended with his unsuccessful senate bid in 2007.

"I made the decision back in December that I was not going to run this year," said Nixon, a Republican. "But it looked like the party was unsuccessful in recruiting somebody else to run."

His other reasons had to do with the current seat holder for the 45th district, Roger Goodman (D).

"His priorities are just wrong. He's voted for all of this new spending that Gov. (Chris) Gregoire (D) instituted," Nixon said.

Heading into November, the 45th district is represented by Democrats in its one senate seat and two house seats. But Nixon said he isn't discouraged.

"The 45th district, historically, was a Republican district," he said. "People have elected me twice in the past and I think that they will elect me again."

The district encompasses Sammamish north of Northeast 16th Street, as well as parts of nine other Eastside cities and unincorporated King County. Part of Nixon's optimism is based on polls that indicated about 35 percent of district voters are Democrats, about 35 percent are Republican, and another 30 percent vote based on the issues of the time. Like Goodman, Nixon ranks transportation and education as his top priorities. On the 520 bridge, a hot topic in this year's gubernatorial race, Nixon said he supports Republican Dino Rossi's eight-lane bridge approach.

“My preference has always been to have an eight-lane bridge,” he said. “If we can’t do that, then I like the idea of pontoons that we put on the bridge to have the capacity for the added lanes, even if we don’t paint the lanes that way initially.”

He said he does not support the Sound Transit’s Proposition 1, set to appear on the November ballot.

“If we’re going to have more transit, I would do it by expanding the bus system. I would build more park-and-ride space. I would do more of an on-demand transit system,” he said.

His on-demand transit system would entail requesting special service through the Internet or text messaging, a solution similar to Microsoft’s Connector. As for the recent news of the state’s projected \$3.2 billion deficit next year, Nixon said the legislature will have to make hard cuts.

“There’s not an actual deficit yet. We have to adjust our hopes or expectations and reduce spending,” he said. “I would oppose any tax increases, especially with the economy as it is.”

His first target for budget cuts would be added programs or program expansions in the last four years. Nixon has set his sights on 6,000 employees the state hired in the last four years, as well as a life sciences discovery fund and expanded health care benefits for illegal immigrants. The life sciences discovery fund constitutes about \$350 million, authorized by the state legislature in 2005, to be distributed by a state agency in 10-year time span. The purpose of the funding is to encourage local growth in several branches of scientific study that could benefit human health.

“Let’s not fund those new things. Let’s get back to making sure we’re funding what’s important, which is basic education.”

Nixon said he differs with Goodman on education, too. While Goodman emphasizes the importance of schooling and care before kindergarten, Nixon rejects such an approach as part of the legislature’s funding obligation. He framed the argument as one between adding funding to new preschool programs or increasing funding to existing, under-funded K-12 education programs.

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