

April 27, 2009

Dear Fellow State Employee:

As you know, we just finished perhaps the toughest legislative session since the Great Depression. There may be a special session to complete a handful of items, but the truly heavy lifting is done including passage of the operating budget.

I know the last months have been hard for you and your families too. There is uncertainty about the future of programs to which you have dedicated your working life, as well as uncertainty about your own future.

Although overall budget uncertainty has ended, there is still a lot of hard work ahead as our agencies absorb and manage their way through budget cuts to balance a \$9 billion shortfall. It is up to us to make this budget work as best we can!

All of us, as a team, must carry out the work ahead with great sensitivity and care. I know this is not just a budget document. It's about all of you, the families who depend on you, and the citizens we all came to serve.

In the weeks, months and years ahead, all Washingtonians will feel the impacts of the hard decisions the Legislature made – and we are now required to make along with nearly every other state – after the mortgage and financial markets set off the Great Recession we find ourselves in.

You are the men and women who will connect with Washingtonians at very important and personal levels – explaining, helping us set priorities, and serving wisely and compassionately.

This will be hard work, and your skills will be sorely tested. For example, programs and services may need to be adjusted to accommodate significant reductions in “administrative” spending of about \$255 million, which means fewer people to deliver services.

Meanwhile, the budget calls for difficult personal adjustments. For instance, we may be asking employees to take unpaid furloughs to save jobs and money. The funding for our health-care benefits is not sufficient to cover health-care inflation, so we may pay higher co-pays.

Amid these difficult changes, I ask that we continue – and strengthen – the partnership we forged last year when you helped me implement vital budget reductions to better position ourselves for the challenges to come. Imagine the budget we would have if we had failed to take early action to save money.

I continue to need your skill and creativity to reform and improve how we serve our citizens. Reform of state government is not only the right thing to do – it's now absolutely necessary. We are going to have to reinvent what we do and how we do it, and you have the ideas that can work.

I want and need your ideas. You are the people on the ground, and I can't do this without you. Please respond to this e-mail, as you did last summer and fall, to share your input.

I'll close with optimism.

I sense a change in this country that bodes well for us and for society as a whole. After years of pursuing other, more financially "lucrative" careers, more college graduates are showing renewed interest in public service. There is a new generation that wants to serve as much as we do. There is a new respect building for the work we do – which is to serve the greater good. What we do does matter. What we do builds the future.

So let's renew the commitments that brought us to state service in the first place – to serve for the good of our communities. I'm counting on you, and so are the people of this great state.

Thank you, Chris