



31 JULY 2017

Lobbyists Give the 2017 Session a “D+”

The people who get paid to work with the legislature—registered lobbyists—gave lawmakers’ performance in the recent session their lowest grade in 7 years in this year’s Elway Poll of the Third House. Asked to give the session a letter grade “like they do in school,” survey respondents gave it a “D+” (GPA=1.46). Only 15% gave the session an “A” or “B”, while 55% gave it a “D” or “F”.

Overall grades had improved over the previous 3 sessions, from 1.54 in 2013 to 1.78 last year, before dropping 0.32 points this year to 1.46.

The overall grade this year was lower than the sum of its parts. Lobbyists graded the legislature’s work on each of 8 subject areas higher than the overall session. Six of the 8 areas got higher grades than they got last year, the exceptions being higher education and the environment.

The dominant issue this year was the state budget and specifically the funding package for K-12 public education. Some 59% of respondents cited K-12 funding when asked to name the “most significant outcome” of the session in an open-ended question. The Family leave legislation came in 2nd with 17% of mentions.

The lobbyists seemed to like the budget, but hate the process that produced it:

81% of respondents graded the budget *document* as “satisfactory” (“C”) or better, with 48% giving it an “A” or “B” (GPA = 2.33). However, 75% gave the budget *process* a “D” or “F” (GPA = 0.96).

Satisfaction with the budget document was also reflected in the grade for K-12 education, which rose to “C+” this year from “D+” last year.

60% gave the legislature’s performance on K-12 Education an “A” or “B” this year.

56% had given it a “D” or “F” last year.

Lobbyists’ biggest disappointment was the failure to pass a capital budget—volunteered by 55% of respondents—and the related failure to resolve the water rights controversy embodied in the Hirst case (25%). The two were linked of course, because the Senate Republicans refused to move on the capital budget unless the Hirst case was resolved. This maneuver came in for much derision when survey respondents were asked to comment on the session at the end of the survey.

Partisan conflict also came in for frequent criticism. Several lobbyists decried the toxic atmosphere of the “other Washington” becoming more prevalent here. One said partisan rancor was the worst in his/her 26 years in Olympia. Another said: “*I thought this was the good Washington.*”

This survey was conducted online. 162 of 646 registered lobbyists completed the questionnaire between July 12-29.

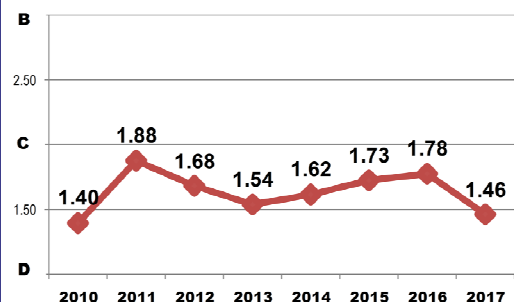
41% have been lobbying for more than 10 years; for 8%, this was their first session.

43% were independent, contract lobbyists; 57% work for the organization they lobby for.

2017 LEGISLATURE REPORT CARD

OVERALL PERFORMANCE	D+
K-12 Education	C+
Transportation	C+
Social/Human Services	C+
Health Care	C
Public Safety	C
Higher Education	C
The Economy	C-
Environment/Nat.Resources	C-

LEGISLATURE “GPA”: 2010 –2017



Grading the 5 Corners

Lobbyists were asked to grade the performance of the 4 caucuses and the Governor—the so-called “5 corners” of the legislative process.

House Republicans got the highest grade for the second session in a row, although their 2.09 was slightly lower than last year (2.12). It may say something about the process that the caucus with the least power keeps getting the highest performance rating.

Senate Republicans got the lowest grades of the 4 caucuses (1.71), down from 1.98 last year. The Senate Rs had the most divided grades: they got the most “D/F” grades by far of any caucus (50%); but were even with the House Ds for most “A/B” grades (34%).

The two Democrat caucuses—House and Senate—got identical 1.95 grade points, although opinion was more divided about the House Democrats: They got more “A/B” grades and more “D/F” grade than their Senate cousins.

Governor Inslee’s performance was once again graded the lowest of the “5 corners,” although his grade was better than it was last year (1.29, up from 1.11). A 57% majority gave him a “D/F” this year, compared to 68% last year. 35% gave him a failing grade (“F”) both years.

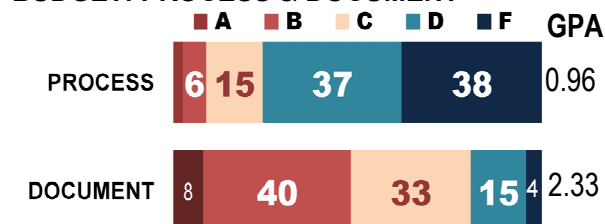
The Governor again got lower grades from the old hands than from newer lobbyists: 62% of those who have been at it for 6+ years gave him an “D/F”; while 52% of those with 5 or fewer years’ experience gave him a “C” (satisfactory) or better.

Most Significant Outcome & Disappointment

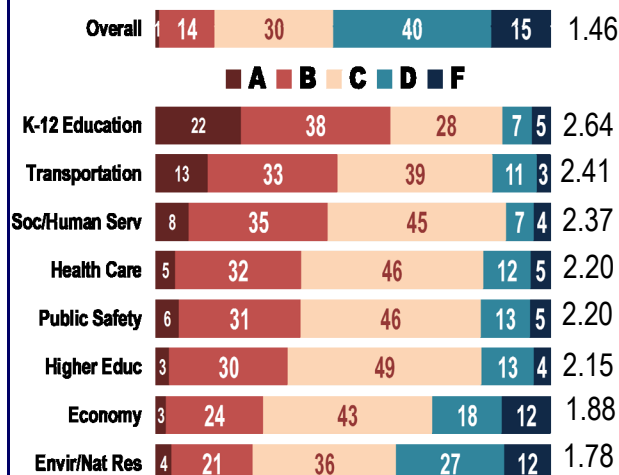
OUTCOME		DISAPPOINTMENT	
K-12 Funding	59%	Capital Budget	55%
Family Leave	17%	Hirst Impasse	25%
Budget	7%	Time Required	11%
Lack of Action	7%	Political Games	9%
Specific Legislation	5%	Education Issues	7%
Social Services	5%	Budget Process	6%
No Tax Increase	3%	Budget Document	4%
Partisan Conflict	3%	Governor	4%
Getting Finished	2%	Human Services	4%
No Govt Shut Down	2%	Specific Legislation	4%
Transportation	2%	No Tax Reform	3%
Health Care	1%	No New Revenue	2%
		Transportation Issues	2%

The questions were open-ended. Answers were coded into these categories.

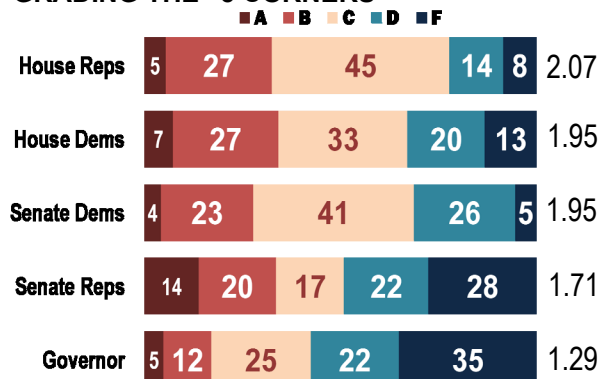
BUDGET: PROCESS & DOCUMENT



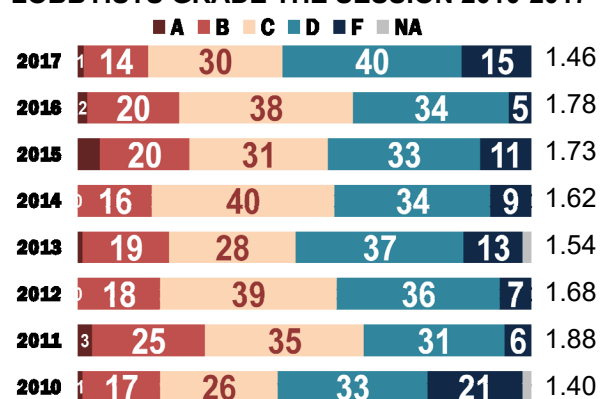
2017 GRADES BY PROGRAM AREA



GRADING THE “5 CORNERS”



LOBBYISTS GRADE THE SESSION 2010-2017



The Last Word. A sampling respondents' observations about the session.

LEADERSHIP

- *With a partisan Governor whose reactions are all after the fact, a Senate R Leader who spends most of his time trying to be a tough guy, a House D Leader who operates like a mafioso lord behind the scenes, a Senate D leader who just throws daggers at multiple targets, and a House R leader who just wants everyone to get along... this session was doomed from the start.*
- *The governor has zero leadership skills and the Senate Republicans are incapable of working collaboratively with the other three caucuses.*
- *A lot of trust was lost this session due to the House Democrats pushing the Governor to break their own deal and veto the manufacturing tax credit. That will have long-term implications that are toxic for Olympia.*
- *Governor's veto of a relatively minor portion of B&O reform bill truly poisoned the well. No trust was left.*
- *At the very least the Governor set out a high-level, hopeful vision for the state in his budget, and it was all down hill from there when negotiations hit the legislature...*
- *If the makeup of the Legislature is the same in 2018, its time to hire a professional mediator who can provide negotiating leadership. Normally, the Governor would take on that role, like Governor Gregoire did in the past.*
- *Remarkable display of discipline by leadership in holding the caucuses together to pass an operating budget which no one read with no amendments. The culture of the Senate continues to erode.*
- *... the Governor did his job - the rest is almost entirely on Majority leaders in House and Senate.*

OUTCOMES / DURATION

- *Special session has not been 'special' for some time. The divided houses are incapable of negotiating in a calculated manner that allows the government to operate as intended. Leadership needs to better control their respective caucuses in order for there to be more negotiating and less posturing.*
- *It's disappointing how the legislature now takes for granted the fact they will drag budget sessions on into the summer.*
- *What a truly bizarre session.*
- *Multiple special sessions ruined an otherwise productive, commendable legislative effort.*
- *The achievements ...were overshadowed by the Hirst/capital impasse*
- *Our legislature has become insignificant. It is special interests and the state supreme court that are the important players in lawmaking. Constituents are not represented and special interests are firmly in control, separation of powers is nullified.*
- *Session was too long, the budget process was unconscionably opaque. The failure of a capital budget is also inexcusable. On the other hand, bipartisan Paid Family Leave is a tremendous achievement, and its positive impacts will be felt long after people have forgotten the failures of this session.*

PARTISANSHIP

- *The last 3-4 sessions have become increasingly partisan. The 2017 Session is the MOST partisan session I've ever seen (after 26 years).*
- *Absolutely no effort from Senate Republicans to do their job and work with the other caucuses.*
- *Democrats are too ideological... Too quick to raise taxes. Too wedded to regulatory excesses.*
- *The absence of an organized reasonable pragmatic centrist oriented majority political movement to fill the enormous vacuum between the extremists who are completely running the show is the underlying root cause of this ongoing systemic crisis of our American political socio-economic systems.*
- *Increasingly partisan, narrow majorities make it hard to find common ground. Democracy at work!*
- *This is not an effective way to govern; threats of shut-down, holding bills hostage, partisan bickering; I thought this was the good Washington.*
- *Too much posturing for the next election--too much polarization from both the very liberal and the very conservative. And--legislators in the urban parts of the state need to do more to understand issues in the rural parts of the state. It feels like we're mirroring what's happening at the national level.*
- *The anti-Seattle feeling of the Senate R's was most distressing. They need to realize that Seattle is the economic engine of the state.*

SAUSAGE MAKING & HOSTAGE TAKING

- *Unprecedented to hold an entire budget hostage over a policy bill, no matter how significant.*
- *This sets a dangerous precedent & ends the session on a bitter partisan note, mirroring the national dysfunction.*
- *Senate Rs taking the capital budget hostage over a policy bill is a new low in our downward spiral towards D.C. style politics.*
- *Senate Republicans did well to secure reliable funding source which was equitably distributed. Also did well to fight back against targeted, malicious tax policies.*
- *The hostage holding of the Capital Budget in exchange for a top priority bill of the Senate R's biggest campaign contributors has brought the Washington legislature to a new low. The frustration and cynicism about Olympia is greater than ever.*
- *New lows for a lack of transparency and negotiating in good faith, when it came to the operating budget and K-12 funding.*
- *Why play chicken with our state's government, economy, public schools, etc? By not negotiating until the last second, that is exactly what they did, and it precluded transparency or public debate.*
- *Failure to produce a biennial budget in a timely fashion without meaningful public input was an injustice to our citizens and our representative democracy.*
- *Many could have learned from the paid family leave negotiations. Hirst could have been fixed.*

What Does the Public Think About Your Issue?

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