

VETO MESSAGE ON SB 6411

March 29, 2006

To the Honorable President and Members,
The Senate of the State of Washington

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning, without my approval, Senate Bill No. 6411
entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to collective bargaining
agreements."

This bill allows bargaining a contract of up to six years for public employees who are covered by the Public Employees' Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA). The intent of the legislation is to provide stability and lower costs for smaller local governmental entities. However, current law restricts contracts under PECBA to a three-year duration.

PECBA covers mainly city, county and local government employees. It also includes several state employee groups, including state troopers, the University of Washington Print Shop, and several other higher education classified units. At least one of the state employee groups covered by the PECBA has binding interest arbitration - state troopers. In addition, home health care workers, and family childcare providers, who are also covered by PECBA, have binding interest arbitration. This dispute resolution mechanism could lead to settlements that violate the principle that the state cannot obligate future legislatures beyond the current biennium.

If an imposed settlement violated this principle, court challenges could ensue. While I understand that current law allows for contracts to exceed the two-year budget cycle, this was not an issue of concern for the state until last year when changes in the state troopers' bargaining law allowed for bargaining over wages and benefits. In the last several years, the addition of collective bargaining rights for home care workers and family child care workers also increases the likelihood of legal challenges over contract duration.

If legislation were introduced in the next session with provisions to address the above concerns regarding state employee groups, I would certainly look much more favorably on the bill.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Senate Bill No. 6411 in its entirety.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine O. Gregoire
Governor