

# Final compromise needed on state spending for education, transportation

Originally published June 20, 2015 at 4:05 pm Updated June 19, 2015 at 5:32 pm

**A far-reaching budget deal to help move Washington forward is tantalizingly close.**

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

*The Seattle Times*

THE state Capitol dome in Olympia could be mistaken for a pressure cooker. Just 10 days remain until a partial state government shutdown closes parks and frees felons from supervision. Budget negotiations toward the 2015-17 biennium have been gridlocked.

On Friday, Gov. Jay Inslee opened a relief valve byreaching across the aisle and offering to compromise. He effectively killed a capital-gains-tax proposal beloved by his fellow Democrats who wanted it for the operating budget. But surging state tax revenue made that questionable. And Inslee widened the path toward compromise by giving a nod of approval to the Republicans' boldest plan this year: a significant cut in college tuition.

The path toward the middle would require the Senate Republican caucus to agree to close some tax loopholes, which they've said they'd be willing to do. And the House Democratic caucus would have to acknowledge they've been outsmarted this session by a more disciplined GOP caucus.

At risk of getting lost in this double-overtime session are two other must-haves. To keep Washington moving, lawmakers must pass a \$15 billion transportation package, which would complete the Highway 520 bridge and offer better connecting roadways to the ports of Seattle and Tacoma.

Years of negotiations between the Democratic-led House and Republican-led Senate have forged agreement on nearly all key elements of the transportation package. But

House Democratic leadership canceled transportation negotiations this week because of the stalled operating-budget talks. That was a mistake and increases the risk the package will fall to the side in the closing days of the session. Inslee said he was “very concerned” about that happening.

The Legislature also is at risk of failing to make progress on an important reform of school financing. The Supreme Court’s McCleary order criticized the state’s current funding system, which shifts nearly one-third of teachers’ salaries onto local school-district levies. Voter approval of those levies varies statewide, creating have and have-not districts and sets up a fundamental inequity, which the court warned must be fixed.

A bipartisan group of Senators have reached general agreement on a complicated way to fix the imbalance, but haven’t agreed how to fund it. [The Seattle Times editorial board sides with the Democrats’ preferred funding source](#) — a capital-gains tax — so long as those revenues are dedicated to a restructured school-finance system and have strict spending controls.

It is now clear the levy reform work won’t fully yield fruit this year, but the bipartisan work in the Senate should be the foundation for future legislation. The state Supreme Court may yet rebuke the Legislature and Inslee for failing to make levy reform a bigger priority.

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However, the 2015 legislative session is poised to produce a very solid spending plan for education. At least \$1.3 billion in new spending would limit K-3 class sizes and pay for statewide all-day kindergarten. A big expansion of early learning and a lifeline for the beleaguered mental-health system also are assured, and state workers and teachers could get raises.

And, thanks to the GOP plan, college students and their parents could get a historic tuition cut. To get all this done, lawmakers must meet in the middle in the next week, then go home.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, Blanca Torres, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*