

Politics & Government AUGUST 17, 2015

Despite mounting fines, lawmakers plan to take time to answer McCleary ruling



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Gov. Jay Inslee talks to the media Monday in SeaTac following a meeting with legislative leaders about recent sanctions by the state Supreme Court. The state is being fined \$100,000 a day, to be put in a special education account, for its lack of progress on a plan to full fund basic education. **Rachel La Corte** - The Associated Press

BY MELISSA SANTOS
Staff writer

Getting the Legislature to return for yet another special session may take more than a daily \$100,000 fine.

Gov. Jay Inslee and legislative leaders met Monday in SeaTac to discuss how lawmakers should respond to court sanctions issued last week in the ongoing McCleary education funding case.

But following the hourlong meeting, Inslee said he wouldn't immediately call a special session of the Legislature to address the state Supreme Court's latest order, even as the state gets fined by the day. And some lawmakers seemed to think that calling the Legislature back to Olympia before its scheduled return in January may not be needed at all.

"There are a lot of challenges," said House Minority Leader Dan Kristiansen, R-Snohomish. "Making sure that we do this right rather than quickly — I think that's what needs to be the priority."

On Thursday, the court's nine justices ordered the state to pay \$100,000 a day in fines until the Legislature produces a detailed plan to fully fund education. The court first asked for such a plan more than a year ago, and found the state in contempt in September after the Legislature failed to deliver one.

In its latest order, the court encouraged Inslee to call the Legislature back to Olympia, even promising to forgive fines for days that lawmakers spend working in special session to comply with the court's order.

But on Monday, Inslee said he is first pushing lawmakers to work behind-the-scenes to come up with a plan that both political parties could accept before convening what would be the Legislature's fourth special session of 2015.

"I am going to ask legislators to work on this vigorously before a special session to tee up a solution that we then could pass in quick order in a special session," Inslee said Monday.

"I'm going to urge them to act starting today, perhaps on a daily basis, to fashion that plan," the Democratic governor said.

Legislative leaders in the House and Senate will now meet with members of their caucuses to discuss what their next steps should be, Inslee said. Leaders will speak again with the governor in the next few days to discuss plans in more detail, Inslee said.

In the McCleary case, the state Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that Washington was failing to meet its constitutional obligation to fully fund its public schools, and that it must correct the funding gap by 2018.

Lawmakers put \$1.3 billion this year toward funding some areas called out in the 2012 ruling, including lowering class sizes in kindergarten through third grade, paying for school supplies and operating costs, and expanding all-day kindergarten.

But the court criticized the Legislature's lack of progress in assuming the full share of school employee salary costs, which are picked up in part by local school districts — a state of affairs the court has said is unconstitutional.

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