

Statement from Sen. Don Benton, R-Vancouver-Saturday, January 30, 2016.

With my current term ending on Dec. 31, it is with great sadness that I announce that this will be my last term in the Senate and I'm not seeking re-election. Given my love for public service, I make this decision with a heavy heart, but it has become clear to me that my current employer has decided that it is no longer desirable for me to serve in the legislature while doing my job at the county.

Serving the people of the 17th District in the Washington Legislature for the last 22 years has been one of the greatest honors and privileges in my life. I am truly humbled by the faith the voters have shown in me, and I appreciate the opportunity they have given me to make our state better and represent the interests of our region.

For that reason, I feel it is imperative that I complete the remainder of my current term. While the Legislature is in the 2016 session, I will continue to take unpaid leave as I always have for my legislative work in Olympia.

One of the amazing things about Washington is that we have a citizen legislature. Instead of full-time politicians, our House and Senate is comprised of men and women from a variety of backgrounds, most of whom take time away from their day jobs to serve the people of this state.

This benefits the Legislature, because our lawmakers reflect the full diversity of our state. We are not just Representatives or Senators, but also small business owners, labor union staffers, farmers, teachers and local government employees. And it has truly been amazing to work with such a wide array of good people who bring such a variety of experiences and knowledge, as well as commitment, to Olympia.

But this part-time legislature also benefits the lawmaker's employer. Having an employee serve in the Legislature means

that there is someone in Olympia who understands their concerns and how decisions made in Olympia will impact them. And most employers value this.

That has been the case for me as well. For years I operated a small business, so I was able to bring that concern for our job creators to my work in the Senate. Likewise, as a county employee, I have been able to fight for the people of Clark County and have understood the struggles faced by local governments. I've been an advocate for legislative solutions to address those concerns. This always required some sacrifice on the part of our business and our family but Mary and I always thought it was worth it.

Since being hired as the Clark County Director of Environmental Services, I have demonstrated that I can excel in that position, while also fighting hard for taxpayers, seniors, veterans, property owners, the homeless, workers and employers, as well as for the interest of our region. The volume of legislation I passed and the numerous records broken at the county job during 2014 and 2015 provide the proof of success.

I'm pleased with our legislative achievements over the past twenty-two years. In Olympia I have worked in a bipartisan fashion to find solutions that help small businesses grow jobs. Together with Republicans and Democrats, we have been able to pass much-needed reforms to our unemployment insurance and worker's compensation programs. I have always fought vigorously against tax increases, including being one of the most vocal defenders of the voter-approved 2/3rds requirement to raise taxes and my vote just moved the 2/3 constitutional amendment out of committee last week. I helped to broker a bipartisan agreement to maintain needed funds for our successful homelessness programs. I have always stood up for our seniors, doing everything in my power to reduce their tax burden and keep them in their own homes. I have always been a

“tough on crime” legislator passing the much needed Chelsea Harrison Act closing loopholes in the “Three Strikes Your Out” law. And no one has been a more passionate defender of property rights, working to stop the abuse of eminent domain.

I fought intensely against the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project from its infancy. I did so, because I knew from the beginning that light rail and more tolls wasn’t the right fit for what Vancouver, Clark County, and Washington State needed.

But perhaps more than any other issue, my heart has been heaviest when it comes to supporting our veterans. No one needs or deserves our total support more than veterans. As a freshman legislator I succeeded where many had failed before me. In 1995 Governor Locke signed into law my bill creating a World War II memorial on the State Capitol campus. Every year since, I have sponsored, co-sponsored and voted for multiple bills that help our veterans and their families, including my bill this year aimed at helping our veterans get access to the supplement medical insurance they need for their families.

I am equally proud of the work I have done as the director of the Environmental Services department in Clark County.

Since my selection for the position in 2013, our department has had a number of successes, most notably:

- Maximized efficiencies and consolidated aspects of the Clean Water Program saving the program from insolvency, avoiding huge fee increases, massive staff layoffs and more citizen law suits.
- Ended a 5-year legal battle and brought the county into compliance with all state/federal mandates resulting in the removal of the federal court order.
- Submitted and received approval for a biennial 2015/16 budget 8 million dollars less than the previous director’s budget without proposing any layoffs. The largest taxpayer savings in any county department.

- Created a successful internship partnership program with Washington State University – Vancouver. Providing on the job training for our local students.
- Purchased and protected more acres of critical habitat in 2015 than during the entire previous decade.
- Awarded “number 1” in certified Washington Green Schools in the state for the second year in a row.
- Tripled the tonnage of household hazardous waste removed from the landfill waste stream while reducing costs at the same time.

I look forward to continuing this record of success at my county job and leading a very talented group of professionals as the director of DES for many years to come.

After 30 years of elective public service with 22 of those travelling up and down I-5, I will miss the annual treks North to work with my many friends and colleagues to solve the challenges that face all of us. While I will dearly miss my colleagues in Olympia, I will not stop fighting for the issues I care most about. In particular, I plan to work on two issues very close to my heart – homelessness and support for veterans.