

## **More Revenue, Fewer Layoffs on State Employees; 2012 Wish List** **Local News**

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There are 8,500 fewer state employees in Washington than when the recession began - and in the State Parks Department, 160 more are scheduled to get pink slips to help close an \$11 million budget gap in that agency. However, Tim Welch, director of public affairs for the *Washington Federation of State Employees*, says the new year will bring a different tone to the state legislature, as lawmakers get the message that another all-cuts budget may hurt more people than it helps. "We are in kind of a world of hurt, and they are looking at different revenue options - perhaps closing some loopholes, some other creative ways - to avoid the all-cuts budget that has been out there. They're on that path; I think they can get the job done in the regular session."

In this month's special session, lawmakers approved cuts and delayed payments that get only one-quarter of the way to closing the total state budget shortfall. Some legislators called it a good start on tackling a big problem. Others said it just delayed having to make the toughest decisions until January.

The next state labor negotiations start in February for contracts that begin in 2013. Welch says it has become more difficult to hire well-qualified state workers, and many others have left of their own accord because of the uncertainty brought on by the budget crisis. "If you look at the State of Washington as the largest employer in the state - larger than Boeing, larger than Microsoft - and you're gonna treat it like a business, you've got to be able to keep and attract good people. The current policy of cut, cut, cut and blaming state employees is not the right way to go." Welch says 1,500 state workers lost their jobs this year.