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Quick review of House and Senate budgets

By Jason Mercier

The budget cards are now on the table. Now we'll see if House and Senate budget negotiators can find a winning hand to get out of Olympia with a budget agreement by April 26. We're still reviewing the details of the proposals but here are a couple of first impressions.

Public process: Score one for the House by agreeing (though belatedly) to provide the public an unprecedented three days to review the details of its budget proposal before holding a public hearing on it. Unfortunately when it came to the Senate process of holding a public hearing (not announced until 8 p.m. the night before) just hours after its budget release, my hands burned from the heat of the budget pages still flying off the printer while the public hearing was already underway.

Taxpayer protection: No contest victory for the Senate. While the House budget depends on \$1.5 billion in tax increases to balance the Senate provides a plausible balance sheet without general tax increases.

Compliance with 4yr balanced budget requirement: Push. Both the House and Senate budgets project to be in compliance with the 4yr balanced budget requirement but both do so by fragile margins (House by \$4.2 million out of projected \$43 billion 17-19 budget; Senate by \$35.8 million out of projected \$41.4 billion 17-19 budget).

Biggest contrast: Compensation increases for government employees. The House approves the secretly negotiated state employee contracts Governor Inslee agreed to last summer while the Senate rejects them. The Senate does provide a capped amount of funding for the Governor and unions to renegotiate within.

By the numbers:



2015-17 budget	House	Senate
Forecasted revenue growth	\$2.9 billion	\$2.9 billion
Tax Increases	\$1.5 billion	Net reduction
Spending increase	\$5.2 billion	\$4.2 billion
Percentage increase	15%	12%
General spending	\$38.8 billion	\$37.8 billion
Total spending	\$79.4 billion	\$77.7 billion
15-17 ending fund	\$344 million	\$487 million
15-17 total reserves	\$1.2 billion	\$1.4 billion
4yr budget ending fund	\$4.2 million	\$35.8 million
4yr budget total reserves	\$1.4 billion	\$1.5 billion

For a full compare and contrast of the House and Senate budget, here is a great resource from the state's budget transparency website (fiscal.wa.gov).

Both the House and Senate plan to adopt their budget proposals tomorrow. Stay tuned for additional details.