

New bills harm the self-employed

ENTREPRENEURS HAVE BEEN the foundation of our state's and country's economy.

Throughout history, people have been drawn to the American dream, drawn to the desire of taking a skill, having a vision and an indomitable spirit, for the chance to build a business and be your own boss. They and their families live in your neighborhoods and more than likely their businesses are throughout our communities.

You know them as sole proprietors, independent contractors, and self-employed individuals who work tirelessly and pay taxes. Yet, they are now under attack.

Some legislators in Olympia have recently introduced bills that would force them to become employees or generally make it much harder for folks to make a living as independent contractors. These bills go against the heart and soul of the value of independence, of working hard and paving your own way. And I believe the impact would be especially devastating in rural communities throughout the state.

I am proud that citizens have come in droves to Olympia from all across the state to fight against these bills— already with some success! But we need to stay vigilant this legislative session. Here are a few on my

“watch” list:

Senate Bill 5326 was a deliberate attempt to force self-employed hairstylists, most of whom are women, who rent their booths at salons to either become employees of those salons, or force the salon owners to



**SHELLY
SHORT**
Senator

give up services themselves if they leased any space to another hairstylist. If it had become law, it would have prevented hair stylists from setting up their own businesses, working their own hours to juggle family life. More than 1,000 hairstylists descended on the Capitol at the end of January to protest this bill and to share their stories. Their efforts sparked enough outrage that the sponsor of the bill decided to shelve it!

Even though SB 5326 is shelved, two others like it could make it incredibly difficult for independent contractors and needlessly punitive for companies who hire and work with them. Senate Bill 5513 would seek to force companies to prove individuals who perform labor or services are independent contractors. The bill automatically assumes these individuals are employees unless companies can prove otherwise. SB 5513 goes completely against

long-standing methods of determining independent contractors versus employees for purposes of wages.

The worst part – it gives L & I more authority to investigate and subject businesses to penalties, possibly triple damages if found in violation. Unfortunately, there are third parties who continually harass legitimate contractors just looking for wage classification errors. I can only imagine this would encourage that continued behavior.

Senate Bill 5690 is just as bad. If the previous bills seek to control and label independent contractors, this one could control their income! It seeks to create wage boards that would have the authority to regulate how much you would charge for your service. Regardless of your marketability, it would force you to accept whatever rates the wage board would deem fit.

Your fellow Washingtonians helped halt Senate Bill 5326!

But both Senate Bill 5513 and 5690 are still alive. We need to fight against these bills and stand up for independent contractors and our entrepreneurial spirit.

SEN. SHELLY SHORT, R-Addy, serves the 7th Legislative District, which includes Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties and parts of Okanogan and Spokane counties.