



Senator Lynda Wilson

17th Legislative District

2020 Legislative Report



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

When the 2020 legislative session began I was focused on issues like the housing shortage and domestic-violence prevention, and getting state government to be more transparent and listen to the people about things like \$30 car tabs. Our nation's first COVID-19 case, which was in our state, was still a week away. None of us could have imagined that as our nine weeks at the Capitol concluded, we would be appropriating \$200 million to respond to the coronavirus outbreak. It seems like so long ago because so much has happened in the meantime.

I regularly remind my constituents I'm their senator year-round, not just when we're in session. That's been particularly true as the COVID-19 situation unfolded. I've monitored decisions made in Olympia and kept in touch with local leaders about the effect of those decisions, especially the governor's stay-at-home order. It's an understatement to say these have been frustrating, uncertain times – but I'm proud of how the people of our communities have looked after one another and continued to recognize better days are ahead.

While the traditional bill-signing ceremonies were themselves postponed by the coronavirus response, some important legislation emerged from this year's session. If you have questions or concerns about this report or about state government, please call, send an email or write a letter, using the contact information on this page.

Please stay safe!

Serving YOU on these committees:

- Financial Institutions, Economic Development & Trade (*Republican Leader*)
- Ways & Means
- Law & Justice
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (*Secretary*)
- Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs
- Governor's Business Recovery Legislative Task Force

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I WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Because of election-year restrictions I won't be able to send you news from my legislative office until after the November election. However, I am still allowed to accept and respond to your questions and concerns on a one-to-one basis, so please: e-mail, call or write just like you normally would. I'm here to serve!

RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC REFLECTED IN UPDATE TO BUDGET



I've heard from people across our district who are concerned about their rising tax bills, and the Legislature was in an excellent position to listen – and act – this year. As the Senate and House budget writers got closer to releasing their respective plans for updating the two-year spending plan approved

in 2019, the first of this year's quarterly forecasts of state revenue indicated a \$1.5 billion surplus.

In the end, however, the largest single example of tax relief approved this year comes from a bill I've been trying to get through *for five years* – an end to the tax on certain feminine-hygiene products (*see details at lower right*).

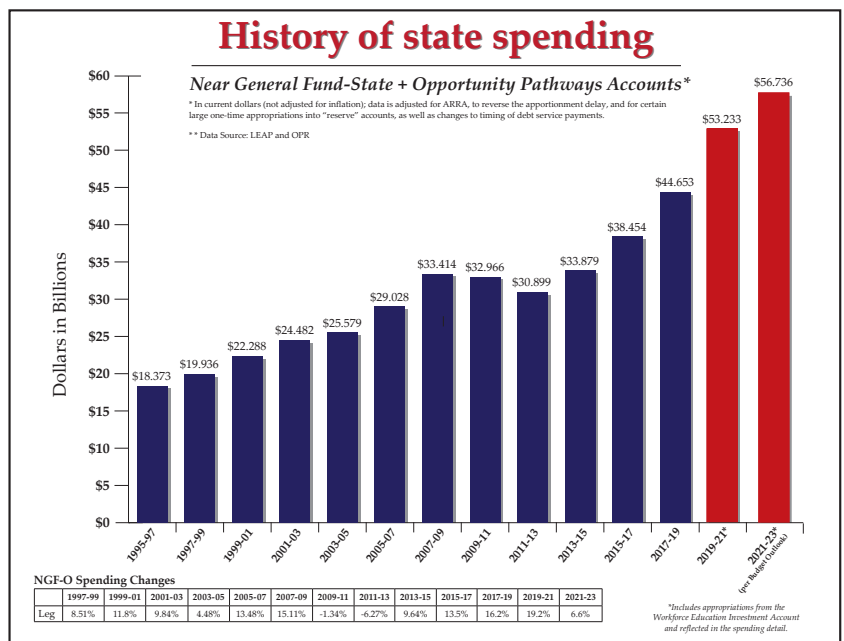
The \$975 million in spending increases approved by the majority side was down from either of the budgets proposed by the Senate and House. That's due in part to the red flags our side raised about taking the state's economic strength for granted, but the COVID-19 situation clearly had an effect as well. Before signing the updated budget in early April the governor vetoed about \$235 million worth of appropriations, which was appropriate considering how his stay-at-home order halted so much of the business activity that produces tax revenue.

Despite the vetoes, the spending for 2019-21 is still nearly 20% ahead of the 2017-19 budget (*see chart at right*). I had hoped the governor would reduce spending even more, because pulling back on new commitments now would have gone farther to protect the existing state-funded services and programs that are important to so many people.

The \$200 million we appropriated in March toward a coronavirus response, primarily for public-health efforts, included \$175 million from the state's rainy-day fund (the rest is a federal pass-through). That's a lot of money, and I was among those who insisted on attaching strings to keep the focus on COVID-19; still, time will obviously tell whether another coronavirus-related appropriation (or additional budget reductions)

are needed, in which case we might be called back to the Capitol for a "special" legislative session.

- Transportation update:** After the voters approved Initiative 976 in November the governor "paused" a large number of transportation projects while legal challenges to the \$30-car tab initiative went forward. The update to the state transportation budget approved this year cleared the way for those projects to resume (provided workers can work at a safe distance from one another). Two bills that would have dramatically increased the cost of gasoline and diesel both fell short.



WILSON TAX-RELIEF BILL PASSED, WILL SAVE WOMEN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

Feminine-hygiene products are medically necessary – and are items that never should have been taxed in the first place. Starting in 2016, when I was still a representative, I've worked to end this discriminatory tax.

This year my bipartisan Senate Bill 5147 finally made it across the finish line, almost unanimously. It will save women an estimated \$3+ million per year! Even before the coronavirus situation, this tax was particularly unfair to women who are low-income or experiencing homelessness; now, getting rid of it will also aid the many women who are being hurt economically by the COVID-19 measures in our state and are trying to save every dime.

THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19: UNKNOWNNS AND UPHEAVAL

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in the fall of 2018 (and here's my reminder to all you gals – and guys – to get regular mammograms and do self-exams!), I knew it would be life-changing – but at least I and my medical team had a sense of what we were up against and the actions we would need to take. Many others have had similar experiences due to health issues. Compare that to all the unknowns and upheaval brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak. It's a complete understatement to say this has been life-changing in ways no one could have imagined.

I'm sorry for the families in Clark County and our state (and everywhere else) whose loved ones have been lost to the virus or are still struggling to survive and recover. I'm also saddened that so many families have avoided infection by the coronavirus but had their income fall or disappear because of it. As an owner in a family business I am stunned by what this has done to employers across our state, especially the more than 230,000 businesses that were labeled non-essential by the governor's office and ordered to close. They were absolutely blindsided.

Government's response to the COVID-19 situation has kept my Senate office very busy, taking questions

and listening to concerns and guiding people to resources. I've also engaged directly in the fight against the virus by working with doctors and other health-care professionals around the nation to bring antibody-test kits to our state. These are essential for identifying people who have survived the virus and whose blood plasma could be used in treating others. This form of testing is also critical for clearing people to go back to work, especially our frontline workers, and getting us the true case numbers so we can all start working again!

I also have been working with other leaders within the Legislature and the governor's office on limiting the damage to our economy – and by extension, the state budget – caused by the need for safety precautions. This includes serving on the **Governor's Business Recovery Legislative Task Force**.

As with any disaster (and the coronavirus certainly has been a disaster) there have been silver linings. Even as this unprecedented time has continued, the acts of kindness and displays of gratitude and examples of innovation have helped to counter the fear and frustration and remind us better days are ahead. We are America, after all!

Stay safe!



BILLS ALREADY ON NEXT YEAR'S TO-DO LIST

Committee backs stronger penalty for gun crime. Our state's firearm laws should focus on gun-related crimes, not law-abiding firearm owners. That's why I introduced a bill to make stealing a firearm from a residence (or store, shop, sales outlet or vehicle) a Class B felony offense, and increase the maximum sentence possible, now 102 months, by up to 14 additional months. Think of how many crimes involve stolen guns; this bill can only help provide a deterrent. SB 6406 won bipartisan support from the Law and Justice Committee; I intend to bring the bill back again next year.

'Title-only' legislation should be banned. Lawmakers shouldn't be able to introduce bills that contain a vague title and NO detail about the policy they would make. In 2019 one of these so-called "title-only" bills was used to push a \$339 million tax increase through the Legislature in the final two days of the session, which effectively hid the tax from public scrutiny. I could not believe my bill to ban this stunt did not even receive a public hearing, and it's already on my to-do list for 2021. The taxpayers deserve more transparency! I'll also reintroduce another bill directly dealing with government accountability – the making of regulations!

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THE TIFFANY HILL ACT IS LAW!

I'd tried in 2018 and 2019 to update our state's domestic-violence laws to allow the use of what is best described as real-time victim-notification technology. My bill fell short of full approval in both sessions.

Then, two days before Thanksgiving 2019, a young mother of three named Tiffany Hill was murdered in Vancouver. You may know the story: the domestic-violence protection order she obtained against her estranged husband could not alert her that he was lying in wait at their children's school, where he fatally shot her.

It broke my heart to learn Tiffany's story, because this victim-notification technology could have saved her life. I renamed Senate Bill 5149 in her honor, and as the Tiffany Hill Act it won the Legislature's full and unanimous support. It was as though the bill was waiting for a hero to see it through, and Tiffany Hill, a former Marine, became that hero.

I witnessed domestic violence as a child. I want victims to have a chance at regaining a sense of self-control and peace – no more looking over their shoulder wherever they go. The Tiffany Hill Act will offer that using a simple concept: If a judge places the accused abuser



on electronic monitoring, that monitoring can be leveraged to create a perpetual “geo-protection” zone around the victim. If the accused abuser comes too close, the victim gets an alert in real time using an app on a mobile phone. The geo-protection zone moves with the victim – something no piece of paper can match.

I am sad this technology wasn't available to help Tiffany Hill protect herself but grateful for the unwavering support my bill received from her friends and loved ones and so many in the community. They made this new law happen. We can all be glad for what the Tiffany Hill Act will mean to victims of domestic violence going forward.