



We the People  
*insure domestic Tranquility*

2021 SESSION REPORT • SEN. JIM McCUNE • 2nd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

# Big new taxes, more powerful government are result of 2021 legislative session

*Urban majority passes income tax, steep increases in fuel taxes*

## Good news includes funding for Frontier Park in Graham, Prairie Line Trail

A new state income tax and measures that could quickly increase gas prices about \$1 a gallon are among the dismaying results of the 2021 legislative session. Lawmakers adjourned their regular legislative session April 25 after a 105-day regular session that proved one of the most partisan in state history.

Visitors were excluded from the Capitol by COVID precautions, and the public's absence showed in the final result. As lawmakers conducted business by teleconference, an urban majority passed a sweeping agenda of liberal policies. Lawmakers may return later this year to debate additional gas taxes and a transportation package.

**Bright spots** for the 2nd Legislative District included funding for important local projects. Other legislation ensures adequate funding for county and local fairs (see following pages).

### The good news:

- ✓ **Broadband deployment** – Capital budget provides an historic \$413 million in funding for broadband deployment, to extend high-speed Internet service to underserved areas statewide.
- ✓ **Some responsible budget priorities were funded** – These include a tax credit for working families, expansion of fish hatchery programs, improvements in mental health and disability programs.
- ✓ **Big unemployment tax hikes deferred** – Massive unemployment last year drained the state's unemployment insurance trust fund, leaving business with big increases in payroll taxes. Legislation eases the burden by spreading increases over several years. Federal COVID relief dollars will replenish about half the fund, leaving it to future legislatures to finish the job.

### The bad news:

- ✗ **New state income tax** – Majority lawmakers passed a new income tax on capital gains, likely to be expanded to the middle class if it survives court challenges. Washington voters have rejected an income tax 10 times since 1934. Legislation side-steps the ballot and prevents a referendum from being filed, leaving a more-difficult initiative the public's only recourse. (SB 5096)



Dear friends and neighbors,

The Washington Legislature finished its 2021 regular legislative session April 25, and we are going to be feeling its effects for many years to come. A Seattle-dominated urban majority took advantage of COVID restrictions and the absence of the public to pass a sweeping agenda that would have encountered

fierce public resistance in ordinary times.

The final product was a massive expansion of taxes and spending, including a \$59 billion budget that relies upon an unconstitutional income tax. This type of partisan legislation will drive up the cost of living, impose Seattle thinking on everything from schools to law enforcement, and establish greater government control over our daily lives.

Higher fuel prices will have a terrible effect on struggling families and our state economy – about \$1 a gallon more within the next few years. Meanwhile, the Legislature did nothing to address the top issue for the people, bringing balance to COVID lockdown decisions and getting Washington back to work.

Yet some news was positive – including funding for key local projects, and a new effort to bring high-speed Internet to rural areas of the state.

With this session report, I want to keep you informed about the key decisions made by this year's Legislature, and important developments for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District. I believe in listening to the people, and I am interested in what you think. Please do not hesitate to contact my office. First and foremost, we are here to serve you.






*Jim McCune*  
Sen. Jim McCune, 2<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District

District 2



(Continued inside)



(Continued from front)

-  **Dramatically higher gas prices** – Costly new cap-and-trade and low carbon fuel standards programs will increase the price of fuel by nearly \$1 a gallon within a few years, yet won't affect world climate. Washington voters have rejected similar carbon taxes twice. **(SB 5126 and HB 1091)**
-  **Big new spending** – This year's \$59 billion budget exceeds projected tax collections by nearly \$3 billion, despite the uncertain recovery ahead. Spending has nearly doubled in just 10 years. **(SB 5092)**
-  **New restrictions on gun rights** – New law restricts open-carry rules, targeting the law-abiding, as Second Amendment rights continue to be eroded. **(SB 5038)**
-  **Higher housing costs** – Even as a shortage of affordable housing becomes a statewide concern, lawmakers piled new costs on home construction – including a \$300 million increase in document recording fees and costly new building code requirements. **(HB 1277)**
-  **New state hurdles for industrial permits** – An “environmental justice” task force gives the Department of Ecology new tools to deny permits for industrial projects, making it harder to create high-wage jobs in areas outside Seattle. **(SB 5141)**

### Unfinished business:

-  **No balance to COVID decision-making** – The top issue for the people of the state, bringing reason to lockdown restrictions, was addressed in entirely the wrong way. One of the majority's first acts of the session was to cede all decision-making authority to the governor. Meanwhile, thousands of businesses already have closed after months of limited or no income, taking tens of thousands of jobs with them.
-  **No check on unemployment** – The disastrous performance of our state's Employment Security Department during last year's wave of COVID unemployment went uninvestigated. Calls went unanswered, checks were delayed for months, and up to \$1.1 billion in fraudulent claims may have been paid out, according to the state auditor's office.

**The bottom line:** At a time when the Washington economy is recovering from the COVID shutdown, the 2021 Legislature made the state a more expensive place to live and work. The people went unheard – and the 2021 session made their situation all the worse.



## McCune passes bill doubling funding for agricultural fairs

### Other McCune bills tackle resentencing for drug crimes, protecting public monuments, expanding property tax exemption

This year I was honored to sponsor legislation that will double funding for our state's agricultural fairs, and see it through to final passage. **Senate Bill 5362**, signed into law by the governor May 10, helps keep alive one of our state's most valuable traditions – the 67 county, local and regional fairs held each year in every corner of Washington. Since 1998, the state's Fair Fund allocation has been capped at \$2 million annually. This bill raises it to \$4 million by 2026, and will help these fairs thrive.

These fairs provide a focal point for their communities and opportunities for local businesses and non-profits. They have an annual impact of \$385 million on the Washington economy, according to a 2005 study. And the impact is year-round, as 45,000 youths across the state prepare for livestock shows and other displays. I am proud to help this tradition continue.

Also winning final passage was **Senate Bill 5361**, which establishes resentencing procedures for drug crimes committed before 2004.

**Other bills I sponsored did not advance, but could be revived in future sessions. They include:**

**Protecting public monuments** – SB 5059 would stiffen penalties for vandalism at public monuments, protecting symbols of our shared national heritage. The bill would make defacing a public statue or monument punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

**Property tax relief** – SB 5391 would raise property tax exemptions for qualifying seniors and persons with disabilities. The first \$150,000 of property valuation would be exempted from taxation, an increase from the current \$60,000.

**Protecting senior communities** – SB 5319 would allow residents of 55+ manufactured/mobile home communities to protect their homes, by guaranteeing tenant organizations an opportunity to purchase the land when a sale is contemplated.

**Resolving fisheries disputes** – SB 5421 would create a process to resolve disputes over salmon resources, by creating a Puget Sound Salmon Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Advisory Review Board to review and evaluate fisheries and allocations.

**Protecting against “swarming”** – SB 5456 would protect against unpermitted protests that summon large crowds to impede traffic, by making “swarming” a gross misdemeanor.



## A government out of control?

The biggest story of the 2021 session was the disconnect between the people of Washington and their state government. There was no better symbol than the eight-foot cyclone fence around the Capitol this year that kept the people out of the people's house.

The problem affects all three branches of state government. The governor's draconian COVID lockdown decrees have been delivered without legislative oversight or public input. Our activist Supreme Court had to invent new law last year to overturn the people's \$30 car-tab initiative. This year's Blake decision (see below) was legislation from the bench – a violation of the separation of powers laid out by our state and federal constitutions.

A government that respects no boundaries is a government out of control. We face enormous challenges in this state – post-COVID economic recovery, effective responses to homelessness, curbing illicit drug use. We'll never resolve them unless we remember that we represent the people – we don't dictate to them. The fence finally came down after adjournment. Unfortunately, damage to our system will linger.

## 'Critical race theory' a threat to public schools, institutions

Racism should never be tolerated. The same goes for state-sanctioned programs that divide us according to race. In one of the most troubling developments of the session, the Legislature mandated staff training programs in "critical race theory" in our public schools, colleges and universities.

This new dogma holds that our nation was founded on racism and oppression, and that our political institutions are designed to perpetuate it. At best we can call this a false view of history. At worst it is a concept that undermines support for our democratic institutions and tears apart the fabric that binds our nation together. The expectation is that this philosophy will be reflected in the classroom.

No doubt this legislation could be seen as creating a hostile environment for those of disfavored races, and could be challenged under the Constitution and civil rights laws. Our nation may be imperfect, but our aspirations are high, and our system is the one most likely to achieve them. That's the civics lesson our kids need to hear.

## Treating cops like lawbreakers

Sweeping law enforcement legislation approved by the Legislature's urban majority gets tough on police, but not on crime – and puts public safety at risk. New laws erode local control of law enforcement by creating a new state police regulatory agency, restricting police tactics, and ensuring Olympia micromanagement of local investigations into police conduct. These new laws increase the chance of successful lawsuits against police officers, even from felons.

This legislation, a reflection of Seattle's anti-enforcement thinking, presumes police misconduct is routine and that more cops need to go to jail. Already our law enforcement agencies are having a difficult time finding recruits, and the tone of this year's legislation will only make matters worse.

We should remember our police and sheriffs are responsible and dedicated professionals who put their lives on the line every day. We count on them to make split-second decisions to keep all of us safe. We shouldn't weaken public safety efforts across the state to satisfy Seattle sensibilities. This war on cops needs to end.

## Legislature gives green light to hard drugs on our streets

What happens when an out-of-control state Supreme Court meets an out-of-control Legislature? You get legislation like this year's 'Blake Fix,' which will enable rampant drug use statewide by eliminating even the most basic drug enforcement. Suddenly possession of heroin, methamphetamine and other hard drugs is the next-best-thing to legal.

The court unconstitutionally overturned our felony drug-possession laws in *State v. Blake*. The urban majority's fix (SB 5476) liberalized our drug laws to the point that suspects cannot be arrested the first two times they are caught with hard drugs. Police may only refer them to treatment – with no requirement that they enter the program. After that, they may only be charged with a simple misdemeanor.

This soft-on-crime approach will increase drug-related crime and needless deaths due to drug addiction. During my eight years on the Pierce County Council, I visited many drug houses and homeless camps where drug use is rampant. Often it takes the threat of a felony conviction and hard time to convince addicts to enter Drug Court diversion programs. By treating drug use as a lifestyle choice, we show a lack of compassion for the victims of drug abuse. We'll need to fix the fix, and soon.



**Sen. Jim McCune**

**Contact us**

The session is over, but we work for you year-round. Please contact me

and my legislative assistant, Matthew Smith, if you have a comment about state government or a problem with a state agency. We are here to serve you!

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**LEAVE A MESSAGE ON**

**THE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:**  
1-800-562-6000

**Legislature approves funding for Prairie Line Regional Trail, Frontier Park in Graham**

Efforts to complete the Prairie Line Regional Trail between Yelm and Roy got a big boost from this year’s capital budget – a \$457,000 appropriation for Phase Two of the project. This trail will connect to existing trail networks and expand recreational opportunities in our area.

Other important local projects funded this year are improvements to Frontier Park in Graham, including \$89,000 for repairs to the Goat Barn roof and \$1.8 million for a horse arena cover. Other local projects include \$36,000 for repairs to the Yelm Senior Center and \$12 million for improvements at Nisqually State Park.

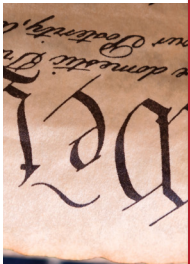


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