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2022 SESSION REPORT • SEN. JIM McCUNE • 2nd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Legislature Adjourns With Spending Spree, Ignores Troubles Ahead

No Action on Public Safety, Emergency Powers, Tax Relief, Income Tax

Bright Spots Include Suspension of Long-Term Care Payroll Tax, Crackdown on Catalytic Converter Theft

The Washington Legislature ended its 2022 session March 10 after approving the biggest ramp-up in spending in the history of the state. The session demonstrated the growing divide between the people of the state and current Olympia leadership.

Positive developments included passage of a bill cracking down on catalytic converter theft (see inside) and postponement – maybe for good – of a new payroll tax for long-term care.

Unfortunately, partisanship rules the Legislature, and the House and Senate have been dominated these last five years by an out-of-control Seattle-centric majority. Democrats this session pressed on with their agenda of higher taxes, bigger spending, and greater government control. Big problems with the ‘progressive’ program are starting to surface, yet our colleagues showed little interest in fixing their mistakes. Leaders blocked proposals to address urgent problems in public safety, tax policy, emergency management and other areas. They refused to consider repeal of a new state income tax due to be collected next year, even though a whopping multi-billion-dollar surplus demonstrated the state doesn’t need the money.

COVID precautions at the statehouse made matters worse, forcing most members to participate in floor sessions by teleconference, and keeping the public at a distance. Lawmakers closed the session by passing a budget with \$6.2 billion in new spending and nothing for individual tax relief, setting the state up for serious trouble the next time recession hits and tax collections plummet. Economists tell us that could happen soon.

Here’s a rundown on the good and bad of this year’s session:

THE GOOD



Postponement of the long-term care tax – A key element of the Seattle agenda, a first-of-its kind state insurance program for long term care was supposed to kick in on Jan. 1. But the problems were too big to ignore. They included limited benefits, restrictions that would have prevented most workers from collecting, and insolvency from Day One. Republicans joined with Democrats in voting to delay the tax until next year. Our colleagues still hope to get things right. Better to scrap it and start over.



Dear friends and neighbors,

The Washington Legislature has finished its 2022 legislative session, and I’m afraid this year there wasn’t much to celebrate. The best news out of the Capitol this session was the passage of a bill to crack down on catalytic converter theft, and the suspension of a bungled insurance program for long-term care. That last vote was of particular importance. Our colleagues in the majority acknowledged that on this one issue, they had reached too far.

The problem is that there are so many others. For the last five years, the state House and Senate have been under the control of a Democrat majority that wishes to bring Seattle thinking to every corner of the state. So public safety has become a disaster. We remain in a COVID state of emergency, the governor continues to make all decisions, and the people have no say – because our Democrat colleagues refuse to assert the Legislature’s authority. They held firm on the biggest mistakes of last session, a state income tax that comes due next year, and on energy policies that will drive up the price of gas even further and make it harder for working families to survive.

The problems with this ‘progressive’ agenda are beginning to surface in a big way, but legislative leaders have trouble owning up to their mistakes. The only thing that really changed this year was that our colleagues spent us deeper into a hole, to the point that state finances are at risk the next time the economy hits a speed bump or a recession.

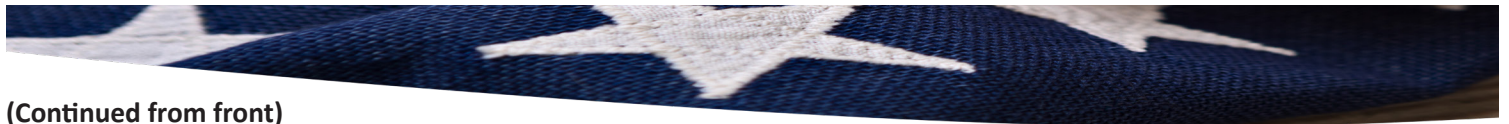
I don’t think anyone in rural/suburban Pierce and Thurston counties agrees that the 2nd Legislative District would be a better place if it ran more like Seattle. We’d like it better if the Legislature got its priorities straight. Jobs, the economy, safe streets, a government that protects the freedoms outlined in the Constitution, and more. A Legislature that believes in self-restraint would be a good start. In this report from Olympia, I’ll tell you about the good and the bad of the 2022 session. If you have a thought about state government, or a problem with a state agency, I hope you will contact my office. We stand ready to help.

Jim McCune

Sen. Jim McCune, 2nd Legislative District

District 2

(Continued inside)



(Continued from front)

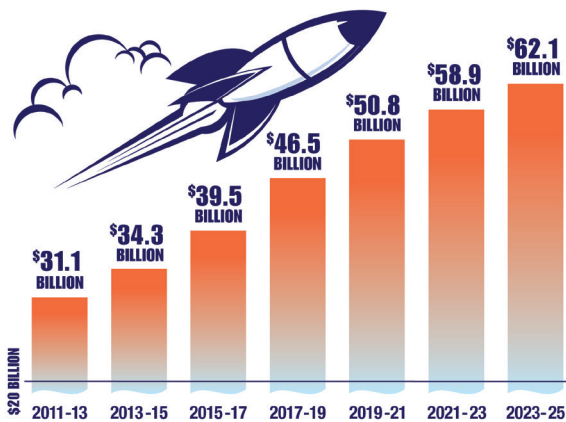
- ✓ **Utility assistance** – The operating budget provides \$100 million in aid to low-income utility customers who deferred electric bills due to COVID. Contact utilities for details.
- ✓ **Blocked bad legislation** – Sometimes success should be measured in bad ideas that are smacked down. Among the bad bills killed this year were restrictions on initiatives, a proposal from the governor to restrict political free speech, and ranked-choice voting statewide – the same procedure that proved a disaster for Pierce County in 2008, and was repealed by voters in 2009.

THE BAD

- ✗ **No fiscal restraint** – Democrats went on a bender this year as an unexpected rebound in the state economy left the Legislature flush with cash. Tax projections were up \$10 billion, and other sources added billions more. It wasn't easy spending that much, but they managed. Our 2021-23 budget is 22 percent bigger than the last one. Unsustainable spending got Olympia in deep trouble in the last recession, but Olympia never learns.
- ✗ **No action on tax relief** – When Olympia has an enormous surplus, you might wonder – are taxes too high? Republican proposals this year included elimination of the state property tax for most homeowners and suspension of the state gas tax. Our colleagues wouldn't give them a hearing.
- ✗ **No action on income tax** – With Olympia awash in money, why is the state still planning to launch a new income tax next year? The biggest issue of the 2021 session, the income tax is a matter of faith to our urban colleagues. No matter that the people have voted against it 11 times.
- ✗ **No meaningful action on public safety** – Big problems with public safety went unaddressed, including last year's repeal of felony drug-possession laws, draconian restrictions on police, and an effort to "reduce incarceration" by reducing sentences, letting convicts out early and returning felons to the streets. See related story.
- ✗ **No action on COVID rights, K-12 curriculum transparency** – This year I introduced legislation on two major issues. My COVID Bill of Rights package would have protected the right of personal choice against vaccine mandates, recognized the significance of natural immunity, and restored the thousands of state employees unjustly fired last year for declining vaccination. My K-12 curriculum transparency legislation would have ensured the right of parental review of instructional materials, to be posted online, and would have required parental permission before students attend state-mandated sex education training. The majority refused to consider this legislation.
- ✗ **No action on emergency powers** – Most other states have ended their COVID emergencies, but Washington's emergency has entered its third year with no end in sight. Washington is one of four states that allow their governors to decide when emergencies begin and end, and ours appears reluctant to give up his extraordinary emergency powers. We mounted a strong effort in the House and Senate to force the involvement of the Legislature, by requiring reauthorization of emergency declarations after 30 or 60 days. Our colleagues were too timid.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Under Seattle leadership, the 2022 Legislature kicked our biggest problems down the road, ensuring they will get that much worse. The biggest challenge for lawmakers in future years will be changing the Legislature's direction.

SKYROCKETING TAX COLLECTIONS



State tax collections have been skyrocketing, and state spending has increased just as fast. In the last 10 years, state spending has doubled, fueling growth in government – and demand for more tax money. Last year, after spending every available penny, legislative Democrats said the cupboard was

bare, declared an emergency and passed a state income tax. But the tax money kept coming – projections have increased \$10 billion since last year. Unspent federal COVID relief money and other sources brought the state's total surplus to nearly \$15 billion. Majority lawmakers faced a challenge this year: Could they possibly spend that much? Don't worry, they did.

The latest budget is a 22 percent increase over 2019-21, it assumes the good times will never end, and it creates new obligations the state will be expected to fund forever. There are 1,300 items of new spending in this year's supplemental budget. We had an historic opportunity this year to pay down big-ticket long-term obligations, reduce the growing tax burden on the people of the state, and address the serious problems in our public schools created by two years of remote learning. Instead, for the most part, we frittered the money away.

Lawmakers made the same disastrous mistake just before the Great Recession of 2009-2010, but memories in Olympia are short. Economists tell us we're overdue for another recession, but the new income tax alone is enough to send business fleeing to other states. We also can expect a hit to our economy as a direct result of new state policies that will increase gas and electricity prices. If our goal is to kill the golden goose, we are doing an outstanding job.



Catalytic Converter Anti-Theft Legislation is Session Highlight

Bill cracks down on fast-rising crime, but public safety as a whole remains in tatters



In a Legislature where public safety finds itself under attack, passage of a bill cracking down on catalytic converter theft was a welcome bit of good news for 2022. **House Bill 1815** was a product of the sort of bipartisan cooperation we rarely see these days in Olympia. Thefts of catalytic converters have exploded over the last two years as precious metal prices have peaked and scrap value skyrocketed. Thousands have been stolen in Washington state alone, as thieves crawl under vehicles with electric saws and lop off tailpipes, often doing thousands of dollars in damage. The crime has become too big to ignore.

But the way the bill was fashioned tells us something about the way the Legislature is operating these days. The legislation makes a good start on the problem. It aims to prevent stolen catalytic converters from entering legitimate business channels, by placing new requirements on

purchases by scrapyards and wreckers. This means complete records, photo ID, no cash payments on the spot and more.

What the bill doesn't do is enact new felony penalties for those who do the actual stealing. Further changes to state law have been referred to a task force that will report back to the Legislature next year. Oregon and other states have had no hesitation at enacting laws that send catalytic converter thieves to prison. But in Washington, majority lawmakers just didn't want to enact any new crimes this year.

New policies 'go soft' on crime

This reluctance to put criminals behind bars is a symptom of the 'soft on crime' philosophy that has taken hold over the last five years. Since our colleagues took the majority in 2018, thousands of convicted felons have been released early from prison, and new prison-closure plans ensure the state will have to keep throwing the doors open. Drug-possession felonies have been wiped from the books. Voter-approved anti-crime laws have been weakened. Restrictions imposed on police last year reached the absurd. Cops can't chase suspects unless they see them in the act. A Longview SWAT team was reduced to throwing rocks.

This year we mounted a strong effort to reverse this trend, with our **Safe Washington** package of bills to restore public safety. I was proud to sponsor one of the key bills in this package, **SB 5686**, which would have clarified that the paramount duty of the Department of Corrections is the protection of public safety, and also would have given front-line employees a conduit for complaints without fear of retaliation. Unfortunately, anti-law enforcement sentiment remains strong in the central Puget Sound area, and my bill and many others did not get a hearing.

Ultimately our Democrat majority colleagues relented on a few minor points, but the worst of these new policing rules remain in place, including restrictions on police pursuits. A bill that would have fixed that problem was killed by majority legislative leaders in the Senate on the final day of the session. Nothing was done about drug laws, the prison-closure plan, or sentencing trends. Unfortunately, anti-law enforcement sentiment remains strong in the central Puget Sound area, and my bill and many other worthy proposals were not permitted to advance

Second Amendment Rights Are Targeted

Majority lawmakers continued to chip away at constitutionally protected rights with legislation to restrict gun ownership and use. Bills that passed this session include **SB 5078**, which bans the manufacture and sale of ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds. The new law has the same weakness as most other gun control measures. It restricts those who abide by the law, not those who disregard it. Main effect will be to disadvantage defenders in a criminal attack.

Other measures that passed this year include **HB 1705**, which bans "untraceable firearms" without evidence of a problem, jeopardizes home gunsmithing. Other bills place further restrictions on open carry (**HB 1630**) and expand "red flag" laws revoking constitutional rights without due process (**HB 1901**).



Senator Jim McCune

P.O. Box 40402

Olympia, WA 98504-0402

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District 2

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Sen. Jim McCune

Stay in touch!

The session is over, but we work for you year-round. I hope you will stay in touch. If you need assistance with a state agency, or you have a comment about state government, please contact my office. It is an honor to serve as your voice in Olympia.

PHONE:
(360) 786-7636

EMAIL:
Jim.McCune@leg.wa.gov

MAIL ADDRESS:
105 Irv Newhouse Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504

**LEAVE A MESSAGE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:**
1-800-562-6000

Local Projects Win Funding in Capital Budget

Our capital budget this year provides funding for public works projects across the state. Projects funded in the 2nd Legislative District include:

- Goat Barn improvements at Frontier Park, Graham — \$70,000. Continues renovations launched last year.
- Yelm Dog Park — \$50,000. Off-leash dog park is being developed by the city.
- Washington State Soldier's Home, Orting — \$180,000 for paving of Cemetery Road.
- Eatonville landfill cleanup — \$4 million.
- Bethel High School/Pierce College facilities — \$1.6 million. Will build instructional facilities at new Graham high school.
- Graham sidewalks — A total \$900,000 is provided for sidewalks in Graham. The capital budget provides \$250,000 for sidewalks providing access to Graham Kapowsin High School, Frontier Middle School and Nelson Elementary School. The transportation budget provides another \$650,000 for sidewalks on Eustis Hunt Road and 116th Avenue.

