



2023 LEGISLATURE DELIVERS WINS FOR THE TRI-CITIES, BUT MORE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE

REPRESENTING 8TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Leave a message for your lawmakers on the
Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000



Dear Friends and Neighbors,


The work of the Washington State Legislature concluded on May 16. While we did see several bad bills from the majority party become law, your 8th District team was able to achieve major wins for the Tri-Cities, including significant capital investments that will provide jobs and boost our local economy.

Going into the session, we prioritized public safety, meaningful tax relief, affordable housing, and the substance abuse crisis. The majority party, by contrast, dedicated significant time and resources to passing new gun control laws, eroding parental rights, and increasing the size and scope of government. We stayed focused on the bread-and-butter issues that matter to you, and we're happy to report that we made progress on improving rules around law enforcement's ability to pursue criminals, combating the substance abuse crisis, and making housing more affordable. We discuss these issues, and others, in this newsletter.

Unfortunately, despite the rate of inflation reaching a 40-year high, the legislative majority blocked every effort to provide meaningful tax relief to working families. This was a major missed opportunity, and an area where we should have seen consideration of serious, bipartisan solutions. Next year, we will continue to press the majority in the House and Senate to return some of your hard-earned tax dollars back to you in the form of tax relief.

With all the problems facing our state, we're going to need the input and common sense of folks in the Tri-Cities area. During the interim, please feel free to reach out to our offices with your questions, ideas, and solutions. It's an honor to serve everyone in the 8th District and we look forward to hearing from you.


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NEW BUDGET SPENDS TOO MUCH, SAVES TOO LITTLE

Like all budgets, the new operating budget for state government is a reflection of priorities — primarily those of the majority. We voted 'NO' on this budget, because ultimately, those priorities do not match yours — the people we represent in the Tri-Cities.

This 2023-25 operating budget, while clearly a Democrat budget, benefited from the input Republicans were able to supply. Thanks to that seat at the table, we were able to get a lot of good things in this budget. For example, spending items like riparian support, energy grid planning, “ladder fuels” reduction (forest health), and the new Institute for Northwest Energy Futures at WSU Tri-Cities were all funded. There was also additional support for public safety and K-12 education that was only included at the request of Republicans. We were also able to get \$5 million to complete the critical Benton County Behavioral Health and Recovery Center project.

One of the big focuses of the budget was housing, with more than \$1 billion going to housing and emergency shelter investments. This plan allowed the Legislature to provide funds to tackle the homeless crisis, without passing Governor Inslee's scheme to borrow \$4 billion to put into a housing jumpstart program.

That said, this Democrat budget provides no significant tax relief for struggling Washingtonians, with the only major tax relief coming for newspaper publishers. It also continues to grow big government, spending too much on increasing already-failed government programs, and using critical taxpayer dollars for controversial and divisive purposes. (See article below).

It also saves way too little. The overall budget adds about \$4.7 billion in new spending and leaves only \$3 billion in reserves.

PUBLIC SAFETY PROBLEMS DOMINATE SESSION

With crime rates surging across the state, public safety problems dominated much of the legislative debate this year. A big part of the increase in crime stems from the weakening of criminal statutes along with new restrictions on law enforcement's ability to protect our communities.

This session, your 8th District team actively supported solutions that prioritize safety, support law enforcement, and help victims.

See articles on page 4.



MORE SNAKE RIVER DAM STUDY MONEY IN OPERATING AND TRANSPORTATION BUDGETS

One of our primary concerns about both this operating budget and the transportation budget was the fact that these budgets contain even more money for studies related to breaching the Snake River dams.

This time it's for \$2.5 million, over two years, to study how to replace the capacity to generate power and supply irrigation water that would be lost if the Democrats, many of whom dislike the dams, ever get their way.

The Army Corps of Engineers environmental impact report from 2020 rejected the idea of dam breaching based on a comprehensive assessment of

both the ecological science and the power needs of the Pacific Northwest. The research concluded that there is no way to replace the clean, renewable energy the dams provide. They provide 5% of our region's electricity, enough to power the city of Seattle. Washington can only afford to lose that much power if we want to see California-style rolling blackouts.

The Snake River dams have been extensively studied. We see no reason for another round of expensive studies — **\$7.5 million in all, when you include the funding in the transportation budget** — when there is already ample evidence of how breaching the dams would be so costly to our state.

DEFEATING TWO LAST MINUTE TAX HIKES

In the last two weeks of the session, the Democrat majority tried to pull a fast one. A bill with 20 Democrat sponsors was introduced to overturn a voter-approved law limiting state and local property tax increases to 1%. By introducing it at the last minute, Democrats would have also avoided the 2/3 vote requirement by having the vote during the last 10 days of session.

Senate Bill 5770 would have tripled the growth rate of state and local property taxes by increasing the cap from 1% to 3%. In just six years, it would have cost taxpayers \$4.1 billion.

Another bill, **House Bill 1628**, would have raised the state and local real estate excise tax, making it even more expensive for young families to purchase their first home.

Fortunately, Republicans hit the airwaves and talked with taxpayers and reporters to let them know about these two sneak attacks on your wallet. In the end, neither bill advanced this year, but don't be surprised if we have to push back against these bad ideas again next session.

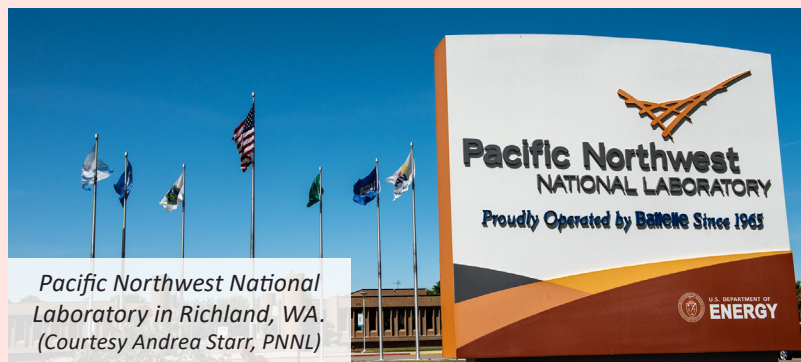


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FINAL CAPITAL BUDGET A BIG WIN FOR THE MIGHTY 8TH!

More than \$46 million in local projects

Senate Bill 5200, the 2023-25 state capital budget, was a big win for our community. The \$8.98 billion spending plan makes significant investments statewide on housing, behavioral health, K-12 schools, and infrastructure. We were also able to secure more than \$46 million for local projects, including:



- \$7.5 million for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory;
- \$6.437 million for infrastructure maintenance and repair at Columbia Basin College;
- \$5.05 million for Process Water Reuse Facility in Pasco;
- \$5 million for Three Rivers Behavioral Health Center in Kennewick;
- \$4 million for Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic in Kennewick;
- \$3 million for Gesa Stadium in Pasco;
- \$3 million for National Guard Tri-Cities Vehicle Storage Building;
- \$2.944 million for National Guard Tri-Cities Readiness Center;
- \$1.25 million for the White Bluffs rail replacement;
- \$1.122 million for south urban growth area water and sewer extensions in Kennewick;
- \$840,000 for Pasco Clubhouse safety modernization;
- \$798,000 for a Habitat for Humanity 20-home building project;
- \$773,000 for B5 Community Learning Center in Kennewick;
- \$750,000 for Pasco Boulevard soccer field;
- \$748,000 for Military Department facilities minor works program;
- \$700,000 for Department of Corrections roof replacement in Kennewick;
- \$350,000 for The Richland Players community theater;
- \$350,000 for the renovation and addition to The Richland Players theater building;
- \$300,000 for Safe Harbor Support Center in Kennewick;
- \$258,000 for Kennewick Kiwanis Playground;
- \$250,000 for the MLK Jr. Resources and Technology Center in Pasco;
- \$200,000 for myTRI Agricultural Innovation Center in Pasco;
- \$155,000 for downtown Pasco North Plaza; and
- \$54,000 for Tri-Tech Skills Center.

We're proud of the investments we were able to secure for the Tri-Cities area. The capital budget is about taking just a little bit of the money that our taxpayers send to Olympia, and bringing it back home, where we can invest it in improving our infrastructure, bettering our quality of life and creating good-paying jobs for our people.

This budget isn't simply about the dollars, it's about planning for the future. Many of these projects, like the myTRI Agricultural Center, will help provide a better economic future for generations to come.

**Capital budget items include all projects in the Tri-Cities area, which encompasses the 8th District and parts of districts 9, 15, and 16.*



AN ATTACK ON PARENTAL RIGHTS

On May 9, Governor Jay Inslee signed what may be the most controversial bill of the session into law: **Senate Bill 5599**. This measure allows youth shelters, and other similar organizations, to not to notify the parents of a child who enters their facility for the purpose of seeking or receiving "gender affirming" treatment or reproductive health care services.

Prior to the enactment of this law, if a runaway child entered a youth shelter without parental permission, the shelter was required to notify the parents, unless there was abuse or neglect. Now, even loving parents who do not agree with certain gender treatments or reproductive services are considered no different from parents who abuse or neglect their children under state law.

This attack on parental rights isn't just bad policy, it's likely unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment secures the right to parent that is violated by this new law. We believe that moms and dads, who are providing a safe home, have the right to know where their kids are. Period.

ATTACKS ON SECOND AMENDMENT DON'T ADDRESS REAL PROBLEM

On May 2, Governor Jay Inslee signed a trio of bills infringing on the right of law-abiding citizens to keep and bear arms, and putting our state firearm industry at risk of being forced out of business.

The Democrats' gun control package this year included:

- **House Bill 1143**, which creates a permit-to-purchase program;
- **Senate Bill 5078**, which is clearly intended to put legal firearm dealers out of business, makes sellers liable for crimes committed by others; and,
- **House Bill 1240**, which proponents call an assault weapons ban, but which actually bans the most common and popular sporting rifles on the market.

We voted against these unconstitutional measures and spoke out against them during the lengthy debates held on each one.

Washington is already in the top 10 nationally for gun-control laws, and has been since 2018. Despite this, the Alliance for Gun Responsibility admitted in January: "our region continues to experience record levels of gun violence."

Banning a particular kind of firearm won't make a meaningful difference in restoring public safety in Washington communities or address the root causes in societal violence and lack of respect for life that we see in the lawlessness, crime, suicide and mass murders taking place across our country.

Until we dig down and deal with the root causes of these problems, we should not expect to see any different results. All these gun-control measures will accomplish will be to punish law-abiding citizens by infringing on their constitutional rights. It will also cost Washington taxpayers, as the state tries to (most likely unsuccessfully) defend these unconstitutional laws in court.



THE BLAKE BILL, FIXING OUR STATE'S DRUG POSSESSION LAW

Commonly called the "Blake Fix" — because of the Supreme Court's *State v. Blake* ruling invalidating the state's drug possession law — **Senate Bill 5536** was approved during a recent one-day special session. The measure replaces a temporary statute set to expire on July 1, which would have left our state without a drug possession law.

The newly renegotiated bill replaces the original measure, which failed to pass just hours prior to adjournment of the regular 105-day session in April. Thankfully, the new version is far better than the original. Here's why: it combines criminal penalties with rehabilitation services — accountability and compassion. We need both to help people break free of drug addiction and save lives.

Drug addiction is not partisan. Real solutions require us to work together. Republicans and Democrats took an active part in creating a new drug possession law for the state. Is the new policy perfect? No. It will require work in the future. But it's a far better start than what we were presented with at the end of the regular session in April.

The newly approved bill:

- Does a better job balancing recovery services with criminal penalties, adding more than \$44 million in new treatment and recovery programs, training for staff, and defense attorneys;
- Criminalizes the public use of drugs and drug possession with a gross misdemeanor, a stiffer penalty than the temporary statute;
- Requires prosecutor consent on motions for a pretrial diversion;
- Does not preempt local governments from enacting laws/ordinances related to illegal drug paraphernalia; and,
- Gives law enforcement a better path to stop criminal drug behavior and help people facing addiction.



POLICE PURSUIT REFORM, GIVING LAW ENFORCEMENT THE TOOLS TO PROTECT AND SERVE

Another hard-fought debate this session was police pursuit reform. Sweeping law enforcement reform — including a higher standard for engaging in police vehicular pursuits — was approved by the Democrat

majority in 2021. That change has resulted in a dangerous uptick in stolen vehicles, reckless driving, and additional efforts to flee from police, among other crimes.

With bipartisan support, **House Bill 1363** — fully restoring law enforcement's ability to engage in pursuits — was introduced at the start of session, but not allowed to proceed. Instead, a watered-down version of the original proposal, **Senate Bill 5352**, was put forward as a solution. Although it allows pursuits under certain circumstances, such as suspected violent sex offenses, domestic violence, driving under the influence, and those escaping arrest, the policy does not go far enough. For example, it still leaves police unable to chase reckless drivers, stolen vehicles, and others suspected of non-violent crimes. Our votes on this were split, with Boehnke voting no and Barnard and Connors voting yes. However, we agree the new law is an improvement over the previous policy — and that more work needs to be done.



REP. STEPHANIE BARNARD

You sent me to represent you in Olympia and protect the interests and values of our region. That's a responsibility and privilege I take seriously. This session, my first as a legislator, I worked on a variety of policy bills. From a measure that enhances our county meeting process to encouraging the

development of advanced nuclear energy technology — my first thought is always about what's best for our region. Here's a quick snapshot of my legislative work this year:

Nuclear Energy Caucus

People in our region understand the benefits of nuclear technology: a price-competitive energy source that is clean, dependable, and dispatchable. This session, I established and co-hosted the bipartisan Nuclear Energy Caucus, the first group of its kind in Olympia. By forming the caucus, legislators can share their expertise, research, and insights related to nuclear energy. This collective knowledge will provide a platform that advances understanding and adoption of nuclear energy as a valuable component of our state's overall energy strategy.

If Washington state plans to meet its ambitious decarbonization goals, including the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) goal of 100% clean energy by 2045, then nuclear energy needs to be part of the solution. That is why, in addition to hosting the Nuclear Energy Caucus, I sponsored **House Bill 1584**. The measure would require advanced nuclear reactor technology to be considered, along with other carbon-neutral energy alternatives, in our state's clean energy goals. The bill came close to being fully approved this session. I plan to amend it next year and continue working hard to get it approved.

Two of my bills made it to the governor's desk this session:

It's difficult for a first-year legislator to get even one bill passed. I'm thrilled that as a freshman legislator, I've gotten two across the finish line.

House Bill 1645 gives more people the opportunity to attend county-level meetings. Under the bill, counties can hold regular meetings outside of their county seat once per calendar month or quarter. The measure goes into effect on July 23.

House Bill 1683 requires stand-alone dental plans to bring denturists into their networks. My bill provides a common-sense path to expanding dental access while reducing the burden of the current shortage of dental providers. The measure goes into effect on July 23.

REP. APRIL CONNORS

As a lifelong Tri-Citian, it's been an honor to serve you in Olympia. While the majority party continues to enact policies that make life more expensive, dangerous, and erode your constitutional rights, our Mighty Eighth team was able to score real victories for common sense and stop bad bills from becoming law.



This year, I was busy serving as an assistant Republican Whip and on four House committees: Appropriations; Housing, as the assistant ranking member; Consumer Protection and Business Committee; and Labor and Workplace Standards. After session, I was promoted by the Republican leadership to assistant ranking member on Appropriations — the committee tasked with crafting the state's operating budget. I am looking forward to taking on the responsibilities of this new role as we continue to fight for a responsible budget, broad-based tax relief, and sensible fiscal policies that will benefit this and future generations.

Mitigating light pollution (House Bill 1173)

Soon, wind turbines will have to turn the lights off in Washington state, proving that dark skies can be safe skies. Legislation I sponsored to restrict light pollution from wind turbines was signed into law on May 9.

This new law will require warning lights on wind turbines to turn on automatically only when needed by aircraft. I was grateful for the near-unanimous support this measure received in the House and Senate.

Improving home leaseback agreement rules (House Bill 1070)

My measure adding an exemption to the Residential Landlord-Tenant Act (RLTA) for residential leaseback agreements of up to three months was signed into law on April 6.

A leaseback is an agreement between a buyer and seller of a property that allows the seller to continue living in and renting the property. Although leaseback agreements are a popular option in the real estate industry, they remain underutilized because they turn homebuyers into unwitting landlords regulated by the RLTA.

This new law removes the legal cloud of uncertainty many homebuyers feel when entering into these agreements.

As a residential real estate agent for over 20 years, I've seen how complicated and unnecessary these regulations can be. This reform will make it easier for buyers and sellers to take advantage of a popular tool that helps them both meet their needs.



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SEN. MATT BOEHNKE

As a first-term senator, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I was able to accomplish for the people of Washington and the Mighty Eighth District this session, just by being in the room.

I was honored to be named the Republican leader on the Human Services Committee. I also served on the Business,

Financial Services, Gaming & Trade; Environment, Energy & Technology; and the budget-writing Ways & Means committees.

These assignments gave me – and therefore the Tri-Cities – a seat at the table, and the opportunity to work towards bipartisan solutions to the problems faced by real people in our state.

This year I introduced several bills, two of which made it across the finish line.

Cybersecurity must be a priority

Governor Inslee recently signed **Senate Bill 5518** – my measure to help protect Washingtonians and their data from cyber-attacks, including ransomware. Cybersecurity is a challenging problem that will require a consistent, flexible and proactive approach. This new law is about starting the process of integrating cybersecurity into our emergency processes the same way we do with floods, fires and other emergencies across the state. The new law will go into effect on July 23.

B&O tax relief for rural electric co-ops

My bill to reintroduce the business-and-occupation tax deduction to help cooperative-finance organizations was also signed into law.

Senate Bill 5166 creates a deduction for loan repayments that come from rural electric cooperatives, utility nonprofits or providers. It will allow our rural electric cooperatives to get the funds they need to bring clean energy and broadband to rural communities where it is needed most, and at an affordable price. The measure takes effect on July 1 and will expire in 2034.

Missed opportunities on energy and broadband

This year, I introduced a couple of bills that didn't get quite as far as I had hoped.

Senate Bill 5577 would create a capital broadband investment acceleration program to offer a competitive grant program to increase broadband access in unserved areas.

Senate Bill 5168 is my measure aimed at modernizing Washington's Energy Independence Act (EIA), by ending duplicative and costly reporting requirements.

The Senate Energy Committee held hearings on both bills, but never gave these important issues a vote prior to the committee cutoff deadline. I will continue to work on these important issues next year.

