



## Washington State Senate

314 Legislative Building  
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Olympia, WA 98504-0420

**Senator John Braun**  
Senate Republican Leader  
20th Legislative District

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February 3, 2021

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee,

Although the Governor's Mansion is used for public functions, it is also the private residence for you and the First Lady. It was wrong for protestors to break through a gate in the security fence surrounding the mansion, as they did on January 6. I have consistently spoken against protests at the homes of public officials.

Public areas are the proper forum for dissent -- not the places where public officials and their families live. This is true whether you are the mayor of Seattle or the governor of Washington.

On the Capitol campus, the space between the Legislative Building and the Temple of Justice has been a traditional public forum. People have gathered there for almost 100 years to engage in constitutionally protected free speech.

After the January 6 incident, you made the decision to erect a tall metal fence -- a wall, in effect -- around the Legislative Building. It was your judgment that in balancing the constitutional right of free speech near the Legislative Building and potential threats to the security of legislative- and executive-branch staff and officials, you would err on the side of safety.

At the time, the Secretary of the Senate was gracious enough to contact the Senate Republican Caucus and ask if we wanted the security fencing to surround the Newhouse Building, where most of our members have their offices.

Before making our decision, we reached out to law-enforcement authorities. None knew of specific threats directed at the Legislative Building and the Capitol campus as a whole, so we chose to err on the side of the public's right of free expression. We thanked the Secretary for making the inquiry but declined the offer.

Governor, that was the first week of January. This is the first week of February. Respectfully, it is time to take down the fences which are separating the public from their elected officials in the Legislature. Nearly one month after being banned, the

people should at least be allowed to return to the traditional public forum on the steps of the Legislative Building.

If there are specific and credible security threats which would counsel against taking the barriers down, we would appreciate being briefed by specific law-enforcement authorities. Otherwise, we serve the people and are accountable to them. During this session, we are making decisions impacting the lives of every Washingtonian. To the extent possible, we are still doing so on the inside of the Legislative Building. If you won't let the people inside the building to serve as witnesses to our actions, we at least should be able to hear their voices from their traditional public forum on the steps of the building. Restricting them to rain-soaked lawns far from the ears of legislators is not an acceptable alternative.

Governor, please take down the fences which are needlessly keeping the people away from the Legislative Building – the People's House – and their legislators.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Braun", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sen. John Braun  
Republican Leader

cc: Senator Billig  
Speaker Jinkins  
Representative Wilcox