April 2022

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2022 legislative session ended on March 10 after its scheduled 60 days. As was the case in 2021, our work this year was very affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. All committee meetings were again held remotely. While legislators and some staff were allowed to work in their buildings during session, they had to undergo regular COVID testing to be allowed inside their offices or onto the Senate or House floor.

When the session began in January, only a small percentage of legislators were allowed on either floor for debates or voting, along with a few reporters and staff members. Near the end of our session, the House and Senate allowed about half their members on either floor for debates and voting. While it was good to see more members on the floor as session continued, we wished that all members of each chamber would have been allowed on the floor.

Such restrictions mean less transparency – and therefore less accountability – than in a typical legislative session. Until citizens are allowed to attend committee meetings and testify on bills, until citizens can meet with legislators in their offices or in the hallways of the Capitol Campus, and until the public is allowed to view floor sessions from the House or Senate galleries, we won’t have the true transparency that the public deserves when it comes to the Legislature.

Unfortunately, this legislative session saw the majority party in the House and Senate ram through many bills that might satisfy Seattle progressives but not the rest of our state.

This newsletter covers several of the issues addressed in this legislative session. We encourage you to read it. Although you may not agree with our decisions or opinions, our doors are always open when you have thoughts, opinions, and concerns regarding state government. Thanks for the opportunity to serve you and the people of the 9th District.

Sincerely,

$15 billion surplus but no relief for taxpayers?

With the state expecting a $15 billion surplus over the next four years many of us in the Legislature wanted to give some back in the form of tax relief. We offered legislation to reduce the property tax, state sales tax, business and occupation taxes on small businesses and those industries hit hardest by the pandemic. None were accepted. Instead, the majority party spent almost all of it and actually raised taxes and fees in their transportation package. We had an opportunity to give some back to taxpayers to help struggling families, especially with inflation at a 40-year high and gas prices continuing to skyrocket. It is a shame that Democrat lawmakers chose not to do this. We’re also concerned that their budget left too little for the inevitable economic downturn ahead.

9th District projects funded in supplemental capital budget

We were pleased to join other legislators in unanimously passing a supplemental capital budget that funds several projects in our district. (Sen. Schoesler was one of the capital-budget negotiators.) The capital budget provides money for the construction and maintenance of state buildings, public schools, higher-education facilities, public lands, parks and other assets throughout Washington.

This capital budget makes good use of one-time federal dollars by providing funding for housing projects that will help local governments, and organizations like Habitat for Humanity, to address the homelessness situation in several communities across our state.

The 9th District projects funded by the capital budget include:
- Tekoa Junior/Senior High School ($3.385 million)
- St. John School District ($2.459 million)
- Pullman Student Success Center Phase 1 project on Washington State University’s Pullman campus ($2 million)
- Port of Clarkston river-dredging project ($1.55 million)
- Whelan Community Building in Pullman ($153,000)
- Rimrock Grange renovation in Washtucna ($105,000)
- Sprague Lake study on flooding in the area from the lake to Cow Creek ($100,000)

The updated capital budget also funds a project in Almira, a Lincoln County community outside the 9th District. Nearly $13 million is included to help fund the replacement of Almira Elementary School, which burned down last year.

Inslee vetoes will change Eastern Washington rural aesthetic

We are beyond disappointed that Gov. Inslee vetoed four sections of House Bill 1812 that would have given Eastern Washington residents more input and a broader look at siting of wind and solar projects. These sections are amendments Rep. Dye and Rep. Mark Klicker, R-Walla Walla, added to the bill that would have allowed Eastern Washington rural communities and landowners to see the “big picture” of what 30 years of siting utility-scale wind and solar would do to Washington’s rural landscape. We are concerned the vetoes clear the way for the governor’s vision to replace much of our valuable agricultural lands across Eastern Washington with solar and wind farms that will benefit Puget Sound with no regard for the citizens who live here. Read more: marydye.houserepublicans.wa.gov/2022/03/25/vetoes-change-landscape.
Costly transportation funding package will not help 9th District

One of the worst bills the majority passed this session was the “Move Ahead Washington” transportation package, which will impose major fee increases on drivers across the state while funding transportation projects only in a few parts of the state. Gov. Inslee recently signed it.

This package will punish people who drive or own a car by significantly raising fees related to driving. However, it does not sufficiently address the real transportation needs in our state, especially highway maintenance and improvements. The package includes:

- increasing fees for an enhanced driver’s license by 75% (from $24 to $42);
- increasing fees for a state identification card by 75% (from $24 to $42);
- increasing fees for vehicle license plates by 400% (from $10 to $50 for an original plate, and from $10 to $30 for a replacement plate);
- increasing fees for motorcycle plates by 400% (from $4 to $20 for a new plate, and from $4 to $12 for the replacement fee); and
- increasing fees for a new photo for a driver’s license or ID card by 100% (from $10 to $20).

The package also creates a “target” that all vehicles in Washington with a model year 2030 or later be electric vehicles. This is another example of government overreach.

The Democrats’ plan leans too heavily toward transit, passenger rail and other modes of transportation that aim to help people living in Seattle and other parts of the Puget Sound region but won’t help our district or the rest of the state. People living in Ritzville, Colfax or Pomeroy will need to drive hundreds of miles west to I-5 to see any highway improvements, or travel to Puget Sound to ride a new hybrid-electric ferry that will be funded by you and others around Washington. Another flaw with this package is that it lets people age 18 and under to ride trains, buses or ferries for free. While it might help teens and kids in the Puget Sound area, it won’t help kids in our district.

Second Amendment bills

Our federal and state constitutions are very clear on our individual right to keep and bear arms. The former says “shall not be infringed,” and the latter says “shall not be impaired.” We do not support ongoing efforts by some in the Legislature to hamper your ability to defend yourself, your loved ones, and your property. Unfortunately, the majority party in Olympia passed two bills this year that will do just that:

Senate Bill 5078 bans firearms magazines of more than 10 rounds. This new law goes into effect on July 1 and will ban the sale, transfer, and import of so-called “high-capacity magazines,” although most gun owners know this really bans standard magazines as the most popular firearms usually come with a magazine over 10 rounds. Washington citizens will have until July 1 to purchase or acquire firearms magazines over 10 rounds. After that, they are banned.

House Bill 1705 bans hobbyists and gun enthusiasts, many of them current or former military members, from building or assembling firearms from various parts. This is a misguided attempt to go after so-called “ghost” guns that can’t be traced because they don’t have serial numbers on certain pieces. Yet it ignores the fact that the majority of ghost guns found at crime scenes are firearms that have had their serial numbers filed or acid etched off. This bill bans what has become a popular hobby of building personal firearms with legally-obtained parts.
Long-term care tax and insurance plan

One of the first issues addressed this session was the unpopular and unfair mandatory long-term care tax and insurance plan. Democrats passed this proposal in 2019. During an advisory vote later that year, nearly 63% of voters said it should be repealed. When employers, employees and media sources started pointing out the inequities in this plan and its insolvency, they decided to delay the tax collections until next year. However, in our opinion, there really is no fix for this. There was legislation to repeal and replace the plan. But neither bill passed. Unfortunately, we will most likely have to deal with this issue again next year.

Republicans seek to re-establish public safety

Democrats have taken a soft approach to public safety with passage last year of their anti-police laws – and criminals know it. Crime is on the rise. Republicans stood mostly alone this year in efforts to fix those laws. We were able to gain some ground toward re-establishing better public safety, but we believe more must be done to restore tools to law enforcement officers so they can effectively fight crime.

This year, the Legislature passed, with the help of Republican votes: House Bill 2037 clarifying when an officer can use physical force; House Bill 1735 allowing an officer to intervene and use force if needed for the safety of the person and those around them when the person is experiencing a mental health crisis; and House Bill 1719 reversing ban on less lethal and certain calibers of ammunition.

We are disappointed Democrats blocked legislation that would have allowed officers to engage in vehicular pursuits when there is reasonable suspicion a person in the vehicle has committed a criminal offense.

Governor signs Schoesler bill helping law-enforcement officers, firefighters

Weeks after the House and Senate unanimously passed it, Gov. Inslee recently signed bipartisan legislation sponsored by Sen. Schoesler that will increase retirement benefits for law-enforcement officers and firefighters.

The law created by Senate Bill 5791 provides Law Enforcement Officers’ and Fire Fighters’ Retirement System Plan 1 members with a one-time payment equal to $100 per month of service for retirees and a minimum of $20,000 for catastrophic and duty-disability retirees, and duty-death beneficiaries. The lump-sum payments will come from a nearly $2 billion surplus in the LEOFF 1 system, which was closed to further enrollment in 1977.

This change helps our courageous law-enforcement officers and firefighters who put their lives on the line to serve the public. Using the budget surplus to give LEOFF 1 pension members a one-time payout means some more money for their retirement years, while making only a very small dent in the state budget surplus. And there will still be a very large reserve in the LEOFF 1 pension account.
Rep. Schmick bills

As the ranking House Republican on the Health Care and Wellness Committee, much of my work revolves around health care issues. This session, I was able to get a few important bills through the legislative process. While not earthshattering, each was needed and will have a very specific impact.

House Bill 1761 allows registered and licensed practical nurses in emergency rooms to administer Narcan to patients in opioid overdose situations.

We need this life-saving medication in as many hands as possible.

House Bill 1821 expands the definition of “established relationship” for audio-only telemedicine reimbursements. This will create more opportunities for telemedicine, which is crucial for adequate health care in rural areas.

House Bill 1902 comes from a constituent. There was an accident, a workers’ compensation claim was opened and then closed. However, after it was closed there were further complications. The claimant filed all the appropriate paperwork for reopening the claim but the provider did not file their part of the paperwork within the allotted time so the claim could not be reopened. My bill creates a provision for reopening a claim where the provider fails to file their paperwork on time.

The ORCA Plan or Seattle-area transit and electric ferries?

With the state expecting more than $4 billion in new revenues from the governor’s cap-and-trade scheme (Climate Commitment Act), Rep. Dye, ranking Republican on the House Environment and Energy Committee, offered the Republican ORCA (Outdoor Recreation and Climate Adaptation) Plan to put that money to work in meaningful ways. Her plan proposed to direct those dollars toward addressing serious environmental issues, such as improving forest health to reduce wildfires, flood mitigation, drought resiliency, and Puget Sound restoration.

Disappointingly, majority Democrats set aside ORCA and dedicated most of those climate dollars toward a transportation spending plan that builds electric ferries and appropriates millions toward Puget Sound projects, including transit and bicycle pathways. Read more about ORCA: houserepublicans.wa.gov/orca-plan.

Dye’s temporary judge bill becomes law

There are more than 112 single judge courts in Washington. Unfortunately, there’s been no clear method of filling a vacancy on these benches when something unexpected happens to a presiding judge. To address this issue, Rep. Dye introduced House Bill 1825. The measure requires the chief justice of the state Supreme Court to appoint another judicial officer or qualifying person to serve if the previous presiding judge pro tempore resigns, is removed from office, or is no longer able to serve. It also requires the chief justice to consult with the local legislative and executive authorities before removing or appointing a presiding judge pro tempore to a single judge court.
Emergency powers reform

The majority party refused to pass emergency powers reform legislation. Emergency powers reform is one of the issues we hear about the most from constituents. Like you, we are frustrated that we have been essentially under one-person rule for over two years. There was watered-down legislation that didn’t do much, Senate Bill 5909, that came up for a vote in the House. However, when we went to debate this bill, the majority party pulled it down after about 20 minutes of debate and then blamed House Republicans for killing the bill. This was a dishonest representation of the facts and proves they didn’t want to address the issue in the first place.