



8TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT • 2026 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2026 legislative session adjourned on March 12, closing out two years of major battles over taxes, budgets, and the future of our region.

There were victories and setbacks along the way, but one of the most important victories happened right here in the Tri-Cities.

Earlier this year, our community faced a state proposal to place sexually violent predators in a residential Kennewick neighborhood near schools, parks, and facilities serving children and families. From the beginning, we pressed state officials for answers and accountability. We also introduced a coordinated package of bills to strengthen notification requirements, expand safety buffers, improve accountability, and give local communities a stronger voice in placement decisions. Just as important, residents across the Tri-Cities spoke up and made it clear that this proposal was unacceptable. On March 6, the proposed site was abandoned.

While this is an important victory for our community, the work is not finished. We will keep fighting to change state law so children and families are protected and no other community is put in this position again.

The other major fight of the biennium was over taxes.

At a time when families are struggling with the cost of almost everything, Democrats chose not to provide meaningful tax relief or make life more affordable, but instead to pass record tax increases last year and a new state income tax this year.

For generations, Washington's lack of a state income tax has helped attract jobs, investment, and opportunity. Weakening that advantage is a serious mistake, and one that will have lasting consequences for our region and our state. House and Senate Republicans fought the proposal every step of the way, pushing for protections for working families, small businesses, farmers, seniors, and veterans. Those efforts were rejected.

Even with some setbacks, the past two sessions produced important results for our district. We helped secure major capital investments for projects across our region, kept key transportation priorities moving forward, and advanced practical legislation to support families, students, tenants, homeowners, and employers.

As you read this update, we hope it gives you a clear sense of what happened over the biennium, what we were able to stop, what we were able to deliver, and where important work still remains. It is an honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Sen. Matt Boehnke

Rep. Stephanie Barnard

Rep. April Connors

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

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OPERATING BUDGET

MORE SPENDING, MORE INSTABILITY, FEWER REAL SOLUTIONS

Even after Democrats passed a record \$9 billion in new taxes last year, Washington entered this session facing a \$4.3 billion shortfall. Instead of correcting course, the 2026 supplemental operating budget they passed adds another \$2.3 billion in spending and comes in \$4.9 billion above what the state is expected to collect during the current budget cycle.

Operating Budget Spending by Biennium

dollars in billions



This is not a sustainable path. The budget assumes \$2.2 billion from a new state income tax, even though collections would not begin until 2029. So, one year after passing record tax increases, Democrats are already relying on an income tax that would not bring in money for years. On top of that, the budget drains the Rainy Day Fund and shifts money from other accounts just to cover ongoing expenses. Those are not responsible solutions. They are temporary fixes that push the problem down the road.

And after all of that, families are still being asked to accept cuts to important services. The budget reduces Medicaid by another \$202 million, cuts about \$250 million from K-12, and makes additional reductions in child care and early learning. At a time when families are already struggling with the high cost of living, taxpayers should not be asked to pay more for a less stable budget that does less to protect the services people count on.

To put the growth of government in perspective, state operating budget spending has risen from \$33.9 billion in the 2013-15 budget cycle to about \$80.2 billion in 2025-27. That is an increase of more than \$46 billion. Yet despite that dramatic growth, the state is left with less than two weeks of reserves in the Rainy Day Fund. Washington families deserve better than bigger government, higher taxes, and a weaker financial footing.

TRANSPORTATION BUDGET

FOCUSING ON MAINTENANCE, PRESERVATION, AND PROMISED PROJECTS

The 2025-27 transportation budget made major investments in highway improvements, local projects, and maintenance and preservation, helping keep important work moving across the state. This year's supplemental transportation budget builds on that foundation, bringing the overall plan to about \$16.7 billion and adding \$340 million in new maintenance and preservation funding for the upcoming construction season. That is the right focus. Transportation budgets should start with the basics: maintaining the roads and bridges people use every day, preserving critical infrastructure, and keeping promised projects moving.

That matters because Washington drivers are already paying some of the highest transportation-related costs in the country. Last year, Democrats raised the state gas tax to 55.4 cents per gallon and locked in automatic 2% annual increases going forward. Washington now has the third-highest gas tax in the nation. On top of that, the Climate Commitment Act is adding an estimated 52 cents per gallon to the cost of gas. All told, Washington drivers are paying about \$1.29 per gallon in state gas taxes, carbon taxes, and fees, which is even higher

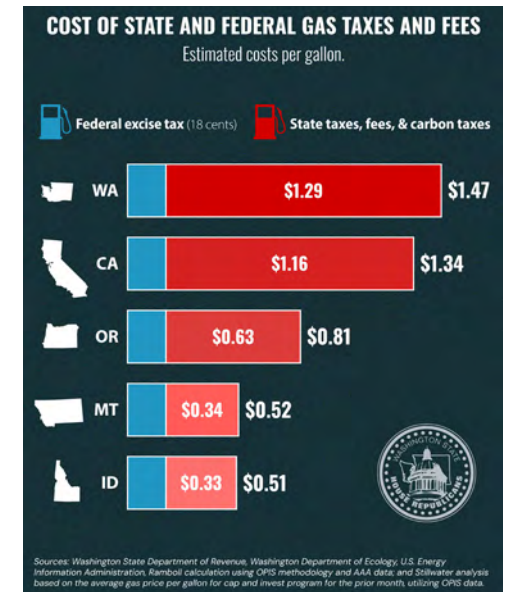
than in California.

Taxpayers have every right to ask what they are getting in return. The Climate Commitment Act is taking about \$1.5 billion a year from Washington drivers, yet the estimated reduction in global carbon emissions is just 0.0008%. At the same time, more than \$1 billion in Climate Commitment Act revenue remains unavailable for the road and bridge preservation drivers rely on every day because Democrats and Gov. Ferguson continue steering those dollars toward climate, transit, electrification, and environmental-justice programs instead. If Olympia is going to keep asking taxpayers to pay more, the least it can do is make maintenance and preservation the top priority.

The 8th District did secure important transportation investments over the biennium. That includes major funding for SR 224 Red Mountain improvements, the US 395 Ridgeline intersection, and SR 240 corridor improvements, along with continued support for the Island View to Vista Field pedestrian and bicycle bridge and other regional improvements. These are the kinds

of projects that help improve safety, reduce congestion, and keep people and goods moving through our communities.

Going forward, the priority should remain clear: finish the projects already promised, preserve the infrastructure we have, and make sure taxpayers get better results for the money they are already paying.



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CAPITAL BUDGET

DELIVERING FOR THE 8TH DISTRICT

One of the most important parts of session is making sure our communities see real results, and that includes fighting for capital budget investments that strengthen the places people rely on every day. This year, we worked together to help secure additional funding in the 2026 supplemental capital budget for projects across the 8th District and the broader Tri-Cities region, building on last year's work and bringing the biennial total to more than \$100 million for our area.

For the 8th District specifically, the supplemental capital budget included:

- \$1.5 million for a West Richland homeownership project with Tri-County Partners Habitat for Humanity to build 18 affordable owner-occupied townhome duplexes.
- \$309,000 for Toyota Center HVAC and security upgrades.
- \$93,000 for asbestos abatement at the Kennewick Activity Center.

That new funding builds on major investments already secured in the 2025-27 capital budget, including:

- \$3.8 million for the Three Rivers Recovery Housing project.
- \$750,000 for the Columbia Park East boat launch replacement.
- \$515,000 for Road 80 Neighborhood Park development.
- \$341,000 for Tri-Cities Food Bank improvements.
- \$309,000 for a Municipal Services Facility backup power generator.
- \$280,000 for Tri-Tech Skills Center HVAC replacement.
- \$88,000 for Tri-Cities Community Health facility improvements.

Together, these projects reflect our continued work to bring meaningful investments back to the 8th District, support local priorities, and help ensure our communities have the resources they need to grow and thrive.



SEN. MATT BOEHNKE LEADING ON INNOVATION, DELIVERING RESULTS



This session, I focused on delivering real results for the Tri-Cities and our region while continuing to lead on issues that will shape our future.

That includes artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, agriculture, and advanced nuclear energy. These are not abstract ideas. They matter here, where innovation, energy, and national security intersect. My goal is to ensure our region and our state are part of those conversations and positioned to lead.

That focus translated into results. Two of the bills I sponsored have now been signed into law, delivering practical improvements for students and families. One makes it easier for students to access financial aid by directly connecting FAFSA and WASFA applications to the High School and Beyond Plan. Students and families can now clearly see where they are in the process. Too many students miss out on aid because the system is confusing. This is a straightforward, bipartisan fix that helps more students take the next step after high school.

Another priority this session was addressing AI-generated deepfakes. I sponsored legislation, now signed into law, that strengthens safeguards against the unauthorized use of someone's image or voice. Technology is moving fast, and our laws need to keep pace. This ensures people have clear recourse when their identities are misused.

At the same time, I'm continuing to push forward on work that is especially important to the Tri-Cities. I sponsored bipartisan legislation to support green fertilizer production here in Washington, building on the innovation already happening in our region and supporting both our farmers and local economy.

That effort is ongoing. I'm working with the Department of Ecology and others to move this policy forward in a way that supports agriculture, strengthens our economy, and builds on the innovation happening here at home.

I also worked with colleagues in both the Senate and House to address serious concerns with the state's process for placing sexually violent predators in community settings. I co-sponsored legislation to improve accountability in LRA placements and pushed for stronger oversight, greater transparency, and clear responsibility when these decisions are made. While those proposals were not advanced, communities across Washington still deserve a system that puts public safety first, and I will keep pushing to fix a process that is not working for the safety of our communities and neighborhoods.

I'm proud of what we accomplished this session for the Tri-Cities and our region, and I'll keep working to build on that momentum in the months ahead.

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REP. STEPHANIE BARNARD

CHAMPIONING SMART POLICY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR WASHINGTON'S FUTURE

This session, I focused on legislation to make Washington more affordable, more accountable, and better prepared for the future.

Two of my bills were signed into law by the governor this session. House Bill 1210, one of my priority bills, was signed into law after three years of work. It updates the targeted urban area tax preference so that qualifying clean energy transformation projects, including advanced nuclear manufacturing, remain eligible when federal approvals take longer than expected. This helps Washington stay competitive for private investment, family-wage jobs, and long-term economic growth.

House Bill 2606 was also signed into law, modernizing the Office of Privacy and Data Protection. As state agencies increasingly use artificial intelligence and other evolving digital tools, my bill strengthens accountability and oversight to better protect personal information and help government keep pace with technology in a transparent and responsible way.

I also worked on several other proposals to build a stronger and more affordable future in Washington. That included legislation to improve the state's ability to compete for federal economic development dollars, develop a statewide quantum technology strategy, make a property tax exemption for multipurpose senior centers permanent, extend adaptive housing tax relief for disabled veterans, and improve access to maternal and newborn care through more efficient term-based care.

I also made the LRA placement in Kennewick a top accountability priority this session. I introduced, co-sponsored, and supported bipartisan legislation to strengthen oversight, improve transparency, and put stronger safeguards in place. This is an issue I will continue working on. During the interim, I plan to take part in tours, including at McNeil Island, to better understand how the system works, where it is falling short, and what changes are needed to fix it.

My goal this session was to advance thoughtful policies that solve problems, strengthen communities, and move Washington in a better direction.



REP. APRIL CONNORS

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES AND STANDING FIRM FOR OUR DISTRICT

Over the past two years, I have focused on the issues I hear about most from families across the 8th District: public safety, affordability, responsible budgeting, and practical reforms that make life better here at home.

This year, one of the biggest public safety fights happened right here in the Tri-Cities. When the state moved toward placing sexually violent predators in a residential Kennewick neighborhood, I got to work immediately with Rep. Barnard and Sen. Boehnke to stop the process. We stayed in direct contact with state officials, introduced legislation, and pushed for answers and accountability every step of the way. Just as important, our community showed up. Parents, neighbors, and local leaders made it clear that this proposal was unacceptable. Ultimately, the state backed off, but the work is not finished. We will keep fighting for stronger protections so neighborhoods like ours are never put in a similar position again.

I also spent this session on the front lines of the income tax fight. As House Republican floor leader, I coordinated our more than 24-hour floor fight against the bill, the longest in modern state history. Throughout the debate, House Republicans offered amendment after amendment to lower the tax burden on Washington residents and protect the state's economic competitiveness. Democrats didn't budge. Even so, we stood tall over those 24 hours. A monumental bill that will have far-reaching consequences for our state deserved a monumental debate.

Regarding my own legislation, I have seen five of my bills signed into law over the last two sessions. In 2025, I passed a bill expanding access to mortgages for manufactured home owners and two bills removing outdated barriers that were keeping high school students from entering the workforce after completing career and technical education programs. This year, I passed two more bills to fix a misguided state mandate that has been preventing important housing notices from reliably reaching tenants.

These bills reflect the kind of practical reform I continue pushing for in the Legislature: policies that work in the real world and make government more effective. I look forward to continuing to advance solutions that people can see and feel in their daily lives.

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OPENING THE DOOR TO AN INCOME TAX

Supporters of the new income tax call it a “millionaires tax.” That label is misleading.

If this policy were truly limited to only the highest earners, it could have been structured with firm protections in law or placed in the Constitution. It was not. Instead, it was written to allow future Legislatures to expand it by a simple majority vote. That means the threshold can be lowered over time, putting middle-class families directly at risk.

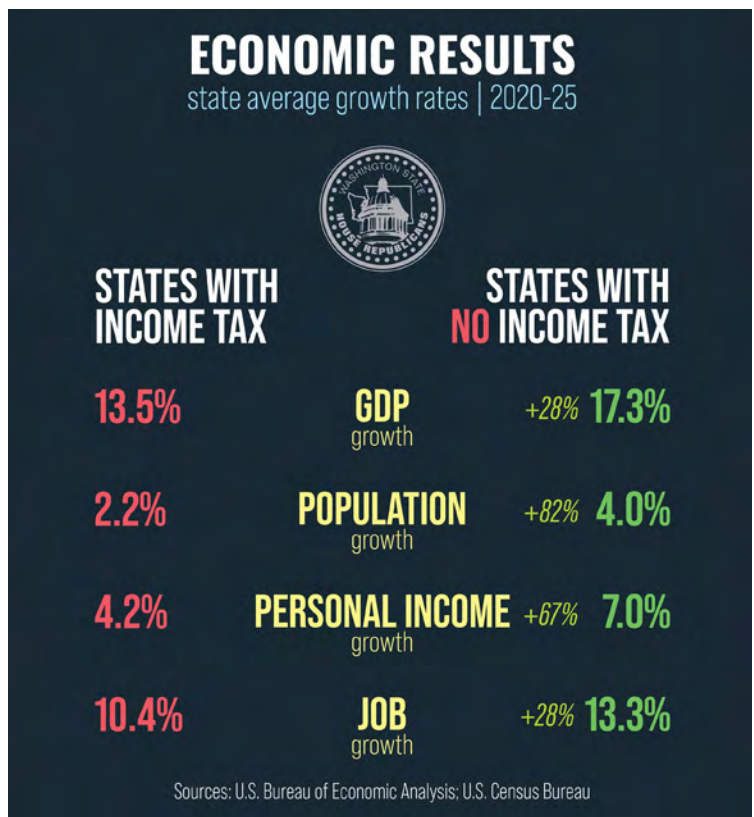
That lack of safeguards is a major reason we opposed it. We fought this proposal every step of the way, including a marathon 24-hour floor debate in the House, to expose its flaws and highlight the long-term risks to Washington families. Policies like this create uncertainty for families, small businesses, and employers, and make Washington a less competitive place to invest, hire, and grow.

But this is about more than one tax. It is part of a broader pattern. Governor Bob Ferguson and legislative Democrats pushed through the largest tax increase in state history in 2025. Over the past decade, under one-party control in Olympia, more than 50 new taxes and fees have been enacted on the people and employers of Washington.

This session continued that trend. Lawmakers eliminated the prescription drug tax exemption, repealed tax incentives for data centers, increased taxes on insurance carriers, created new taxes on loan interest, and expanded fees and local taxing authority.

These decisions do not happen in isolation. Each new tax or fee adds to the cost of living and contributes to the affordability challenges families are already facing.

The governor has spoken about the need for tax relief and stronger protections for taxpayers. However, when it mattered most, he



supported plans that fell short of those commitments.

Once taxes like these are in place, they rarely stay limited. The pattern is clear, and so is the risk: over time, more Washington families will be asked to pay the price. The reality is simple — Washington cannot tax its way to prosperity.

STANDING AGAINST UNSAFE LRA PLACEMENTS

Thank you to the many community members who spoke up, organized, and demanded accountability regarding the proposed placement of a Less Restrictive Alternative (LRA) facility in a Kennewick neighborhood. Your voices made a difference.

LRA placements allow certain sexually violent predators to be moved out of total confinement and into supervised housing in local communities. From the beginning, we stood with you. These placements should not occur in residential, family-centered neighborhoods. Public safety must come first.

This issue goes beyond one neighborhood. Across Washington, families are being put at risk by a system that allows these placements in areas where children live and play. That is unacceptable.

During the 2026 legislative session, we didn't just raise concerns — we took action. We introduced and pushed legislation to strengthen oversight, increase transparency, and establish meaningful safeguards. While the majority did not advance those proposals, we forced this issue into the spotlight and made clear that the current system is not working and must be fixed.

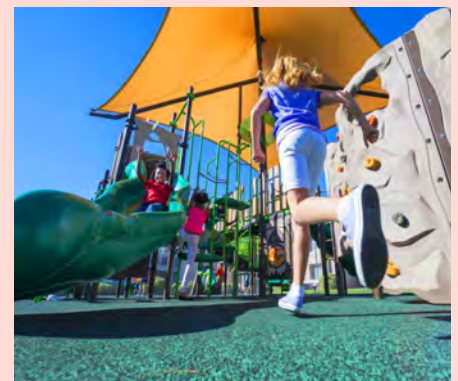
We also acted beyond the Legislature. We joined other lawmakers

in a formal letter to the governor, attorney general, and state agencies, directly opposing this placement and demanding immediate changes to better protect our communities. We will continue to press for accountability at every level.

We will keep pushing for change by fixing this broken process, strengthening state law, and ensuring these types of placements are no longer forced into our communities.

During the interim, we will be meeting with city officials and will continue pressing the governor's office, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Corrections and other agencies to find better solutions.

We thank city officials and staff, along with Kennewick Police Chief Chris Guerrero, and every resident who has worked to protect the Mighty 8th this year.



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AFFORDABILITY

FIGHTING FOR RELIEF FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Our state is facing a real affordability crisis. Washington is now the fifth most expensive state in the country, and costs are rising faster here than anywhere else. Families are feeling it every day.

More than 8 in 10 Washingtonians say they are concerned about their personal finances. Housing affordability has dropped sharply, and the gap between home prices and household income continues to grow. For many families, homeownership is out of reach, and even renting has become increasingly difficult.

At the same time, everyday costs continue to climb. Washington ranks among the most expensive states for gas, child care, and dining out. Gas prices are consistently among the highest in the nation, with drivers paying significantly more than the national average. State policies like the Climate Commitment Act are adding to that cost.

Higher fuel prices ripple through the economy. They raise the cost

of transportation and energy, which drives up prices for groceries, housing, and other essentials. Families feel it across nearly every part of their budget.

These challenges have built up over time. After years of one-party control in Olympia, decisions have added costs and made it harder for families and employers to succeed. New taxes and growing regulatory burdens, including the recently passed income tax, are making it more difficult for businesses to grow and easier for them to leave. That means fewer job opportunities and more pressure on working families.

We are working to turn that around by lowering costs, supporting jobs and small businesses, and putting families first. Affordability should guide every decision in Olympia. Washington should be a place where families can succeed, not struggle to keep up.

