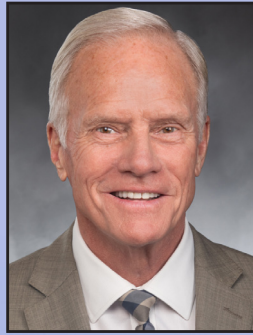




SENATOR
Lynda Wilson



REPRESENTATIVE
Paul Harris



REPRESENTATIVE
Kevin Waters



17th District Legislative Report



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This year's legislative session was notable for several reasons, even before any voting began. It was the first session since 1965 to have the 17th Legislative District comprise part of Clark County and all of Skamania County. In addition, for the first time in more than 85 years, Skamania County was being represented by one of its own residents.

Also, state lawmakers had been unable to assemble in full and in person since 2020. While the return to near "normal" is not especially historical, it certainly had practical value. As expected, the ability to again meet face-to-face at the Capitol with other legislators, and our constituents, produced better decisions than the past two sessions.

We came into the 2023 session with a straightforward set of priorities: increasing public safety, controlling or reducing the cost of living, and giving our K-12 students the support they should have under Washington's constitution. Some of the specific policy issues within these priorities carried over because they had not been resolved last year.

Our to-do list included adopting a new set of budgets for the 2023-25 fiscal cycle. Even though the new operating budget has a more conservative feel than the two budgets that preceded it, the level of spending still sets a record, and again, no substantial tax relief is offered.

The 2023 session also is notable for how it ended. Legislators were forced into overtime because too many on the majority side were apparently unwilling, for too long, to get behind a meaningful response to the drug-overdose crisis in our state. It should not have taken more than the 105 days of our regular session to address the top public-safety issue in Washington.

If you have questions or concerns after reading through this report, please remember we want to hear from you. While the session is over for this year, we represent you throughout the year, and your comments help us to be your voice. Our contact information is below.

It is an honor to serve you.

Sincerely,

Lynda Wilson *Paul Harris* *Kevin Waters*

Sen. Lynda Wilson

Lynda.Wilson@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7632

Rep. Paul Harris

Paul.Harris@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7976

Rep. Kevin Waters

Kevin.Waters@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7994

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW



Capital, transportation budgets invest in our region, state

Although bipartisan collaboration and agreement on the state's operating budget are difficult due to our differing approaches on taxes and spending, the same cannot be said for the capital budget, which funds various construction projects throughout the state. In recent years, this budget has made significant investments in mental and behavioral health, water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure, affordable housing, school seismic safety, and more.

The new capital budget as passed unanimously by both the Senate and House will invest nearly \$19.4 million in the 17th District.

- \$4 million for infrastructure projects at the Washougal waterfront;
- \$750,000 for a new roof for the high school in Stevenson;
- \$1 million for the Port of Skamania Cascades Business Park;
- Close to \$5 million for recreation and conservation work across the 17th District, such as park improvements and fish-barrier removal;
- \$4.5 million in funding to support essential community services in Skamania County that can no longer be supported by timber revenue due to Endangered Species Act restrictions;
- \$1 million to go toward a new regional training center for law enforcement officers, to help get new hires onto our streets and roads sooner;

- \$730,000 for the Camas Public Library;
- \$515,000 to improve water quality at Lacamas Lake.

Overall, the state capital budget (**Senate Bill 5200**) appropriates a total of \$9 billion in spending, including: nearly \$694 million for affordable-housing projects; \$872 million for K-12 education projects; \$1.5 billion in total funding for higher education; \$884 million to address behavioral-health needs; and \$2.4 billion for natural-resource projects that address water quality and supply, salmon recovery, outdoor recreation and conservation, state parks, state trust lands, and more.

Transportation budget: For the most part, the transportation budget for 2023-25 follows through on funding decisions made in previous budget cycles. **House Bill 1125** does not include a new package of transportation revenue to be allocated (in contrast to last year, when the tax-and-fee-heavy "Move Ahead Washington" package was approved in a partisan vote).

In this new spending plan, which received strong bipartisan support, there's a new entry in our district for 2023-25: \$12 million for a mix of "corridor improvements" on State Route 14 in both Clark and Skamania counties, and construction of auxiliary lanes on SR 14 between Interstate 205 and SE 164th Avenue.

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Republicans protect taxpayers, help slow spending

The operating budget, the largest of state government's three budgets, does more than the capital and transportation budgets to show how Republican and Democratic priorities differ.

For the first time in a half-dozen years, Republicans successfully pushed to keep new taxes out of this budget. However, the majority again passed on joining us on broad tax relief that would noticeably lower the cost of living for Washington residents. Once again, for instance, Senator Wilson's proposal to exempt the first \$250,000 of a home's value from the state property tax was rejected; this year's bill also would have benefited renters.

Also, the spending increase in this budget was less than 9%, far below the average spending growth (percentage-wise) approved by the majority in the past few budget cycles. Still,

the new budget that took effect July 1 spends \$69.8 billion over the next two years. It's another record amount and more than we would prefer to see, especially since the state's chief economist has predicted our economy will slow. That means less revenue for public programs and services.

The priorities within the operating budget are concerning. While it supports many good services and programs (as should be expected from a budget of nearly \$70 billion), we don't see enough priority on K-12 education, which is the state's paramount duty. For example, the majority would not support our efforts to properly address learning loss caused by pandemic classroom closures. Also, our Democratic colleagues finally said yes to increased funding for special education yet refused to make those dollars work more equitably by also providing regional advocates for special-education students.

SEN. Lynda Wilson



Four of the bills I introduced this year have become state law.

- **SB 5278** is about getting more home care aides certified to address the "silver tsunami" of demand for in-home care.
- **SB 5497** is intended to increase accountability regarding Medicaid funds. It is aimed at the state Health Care Authority because the HCA doesn't track fraud.
- **SB 5396** eliminates financial barriers for commercial-insurance patients who require medically necessary diagnostic breast imaging. As a breast-cancer survivor, I am a living testament to the importance of breast imaging and early diagnosis.
- **SB 5295** eliminates unneeded accounts from the state treasury — a useful bit of financial housekeeping.

In addition, the tax relief I proposed for food processors (**SB 5277**) was incorporated into the 2023-25 operating budget, as was the

policy in my tax-transparency bill (**SB 5158**). The language in **SB 5672**, my bill to reform and pump up the Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority account, also reached the governor's desk after being added into **HB 1682**.

Given my history on the issue of emergency powers, I was happy that the operating budget approved by the Senate included support for an emergency-powers workgroup. Unfortunately, that was removed from the final version of the operating budget — but the Senate majority leader assured me the Senate will take up this issue in 2024. I am trusting him on that.

It was also disappointing that the majority side again did not get behind my bill to increase the penalty for stealing firearms. It's well-known that stolen guns are commonly used by criminals. Passing **SB 5078** to deter firearm theft seemed like a more effective way to address the violence in our communities — much more than the three new laws passed by the majority that will ban the purchase of certain firearms, harass the firearm industry as a whole and make it more difficult for law-abiding people to purchase firearms.

Similarly, I can't understand why the majority opposed my legislation (**SB 5010**) to add fentanyl and other synthetic opioids to the law on "child endangerment with a controlled substance." We all see news reports about children being harmed by fentanyl exposure, and this would have given prosecutors a tool to hold adults accountable. I will try again in 2024.

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

REP. Kevin Waters

It was an honor and privilege for me to represent the 17th Legislative District in Olympia, including Skamania County, where I call home. It was a great learning experience, and I met many amazing people. As a freshman legislator, my priority was to introduce and pass good, commonsense legislation that will help the people of Washington. To that end, I'm pleased to report that three of my bills have officially become law. I'm humbled and grateful to everyone who helped these bills be successful.

In April, the governor signed **HB 1730**, which went into effect on July 23. It allows, under specific and limited circumstances, young adults between the ages of 18 to 21 to be employed in establishments traditionally classified as "off-limits" to persons under the age of 21. It also makes it legal for anyone at least 18 years old to perform services unrelated to the sale or service of alcohol to enter and remain on premises, but only to carry out the duties of their employment and only under certain conditions. Many small businesses, especially restaurants and bars, are still having a hard time finding and holding onto good employees. This legislation is also going to open more opportunities for individuals under 21 looking for work. This is a positive step forward for employers and job seekers, and the entire state.

The governor also signed **HB 1731** into law. This legislation will allow short-term rental operators, such as individuals who rent properties through Airbnb, to acquire permits to offer their guests a complimentary bottle of wine upon arrival. This is a simple way for short-term renters to build positive relationships with their guests



through a friendly gesture and introduce visitors to Washington to one of the great things we have to offer.

Lastly, **HB 1772** which has also been signed into law, will make it illegal to manufacture, import, offer, or sell in Washington a consumable product that contains cannabis or any form of tetrahydrocannabinol in combination with beer, wine, spirits, or any other type of liquor in the same product. Mixing alcohol and THC can be dangerous, and this bill will make it illegal for products to contain both substances simultaneously. There is concern that over the next several years these types of products could become more prevalent and harder to prevent. This bill helps Washington get ahead of that potential problem.

Legislators fix state's drug-possession law in 'special' session

During the 2021 legislative session, the state Supreme Court overturned Washington's felony drug-possession law because those charged weren't allowed to claim, as a defense, that they did not knowingly possess illegal drugs. This was known as the Blake ruling.

Many in the Democratic majority refused to make the law constitutional simply by adding the word "knowingly." They instead wanted to decriminalize drugs like fentanyl, heroin and methamphetamine. Republicans opposed that. The compromise was to make possession a misdemeanor, and recommend treatment instead of charges for the first two offenses.

Since then, drug overdoses have soared. The leading cause of death for Washington residents younger than 60 is an

overdose. The homelessness that often results from drug addiction remains at a crisis level.

Late in this year's session the Senate and House approved different versions of a "Blake fix" bill that would give courts more leverage to get people into and through drug treatment. Unfortunately, a Democratic faction that still preferred the softer approach blocked a compromise, and the 105-day regular session ended without a solution.

Fortunately, in a one-day "special" session on May 16, the Legislature approved **Senate Bill 5536** to elevate drug possession to a gross misdemeanor while adding incentives for treatment. It took effect July 1 and has the support of key stakeholders – cities, prosecutors, and law enforcement. We believe it will save more lives and spare more families and communities from the harm seen in the past two years.

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Reform of police-pursuit rules is a half-step forward

For the past two years, Washington law-enforcement officers have basically been prohibited from engaging in vehicular pursuits of suspected criminals. In 2021, the majority changed the law so reasonable suspicion is no longer enough to justify a pursuit; now an officer must have probable cause. The only exceptions were DUI and certain violent crimes.

The number of vehicle thefts in our state has soared since then. We understand the theft of a vehicle or a burglary can be as devastating to a family as a violent crime, and knowing

they could be pursued might deter someone from going through with a property crime.

The answer is to move back toward the reasonable-suspicion standard and trust officers to rely on their training when deciding whether to pursue. The bill that got through (**Senate Bill 5352**) is really only a half-step in the right direction, as it still does not deter car thieves or reckless driving. We will make this a priority again in 2024.

REP. Paul Harris

Since the 2022 session, I have been working on a bill that would allow judges in Washington to consider stiffer penalties for those who operate a vehicle in a manner that is both negligent and endangers, or is likely to endanger, any person or property and causes the death of someone using a public way.

House Bill 1112, which was the most important piece of legislation to me this year, finally cleared the finish line. I introduced this legislation because a constituent came to me with a tragic story. Perry Casper lost his daughter in a freak accident. The driver claimed to be swatting at a bug when he ran over this young woman. He simply paid a fine and walked away. It didn't matter that he took a life.

This legislation changes that by giving judges the ability to impose harsher penalties at their discretion for negligent driving involving the death of a vulnerable victim. It also creates a gross misdemeanor offense of negligent driving with a vulnerable victim in the first degree. Under this new law, a judge can punish an offender with up to 364 days of imprisonment, up to a \$5,000 fine, and suspension of driving privileges for 90 days.

This has been a long time coming and I couldn't be happier for Mr. Casper, who that brought this issue to my attention. No amount of punishment is going to bring his daughter back, but it can bring



him and his family some peace and a sense of justice. It will also help other vulnerable victims in the future, by giving judges the option to consider and treat each case differently.

Additionally, **House Bill 1073** has officially become law. This legislation will ensure that medical assistants who have fulfilled all the necessary requirements and qualifications will receive their medical assistant certification promptly. It also adds additional procedures medical assistants can perform when they become certified. The governor signed the bill on April 20 and because it had an emergency clause it went into effective immediately.

17th District Legislative Report

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 1885

SENATOR
**Lynda
Wilson**

REPRESENTATIVE
**Paul
Harris**

REPRESENTATIVE
**Kevin
Waters**

P.O. Box 40600 • Olympia, WA 98504-0600



Contact Your 17th District Lawmakers

If we can be of any assistance during this time for our communities, please feel free to contact our offices.
It is a pleasure and honor to serve as your 17th District legislators.

SEN. Lynda Wilson

Capitol Office

205 Legislative Modular Building (LMB)
P.O. Box 40417
Olympia, WA 98504-0417
(360) 786-7632

Lynda.Wilson@leg.wa.gov
SenatorLyndaWilson.com

Committees:

Ways & Means – *Republican Leader*
Law & Justice
Economic & Revenue Forecast Council – *Chair*
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee
– *Secretary*
State Building Code Council

REP. Paul Harris *Republican Caucus Chair*

Capitol Office

426A Legislative Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7976

Paul.Harris@leg.wa.gov
RepresentativePaulHarris.com

Committees:

Appropriations
Education
Health Care & Wellness
Rules

REP. Kevin Waters

Capitol Office

467 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7994

Kevin.Waters@leg.wa.gov
RepresentativeKevinWaters.com

Committees:

Postsecondary Education & Workforce
– *Assistant Ranking Republican*
Capital Budget
Innovation, Community & Economic
Development, & Veterans
Regulated Substances & Gaming