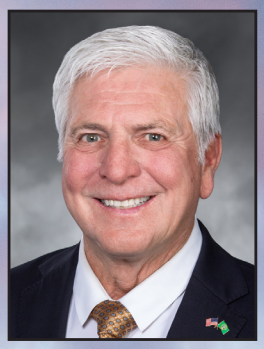
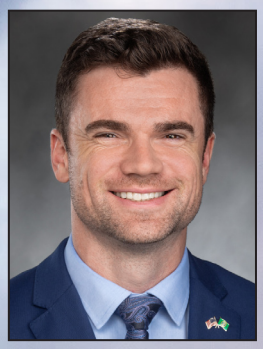


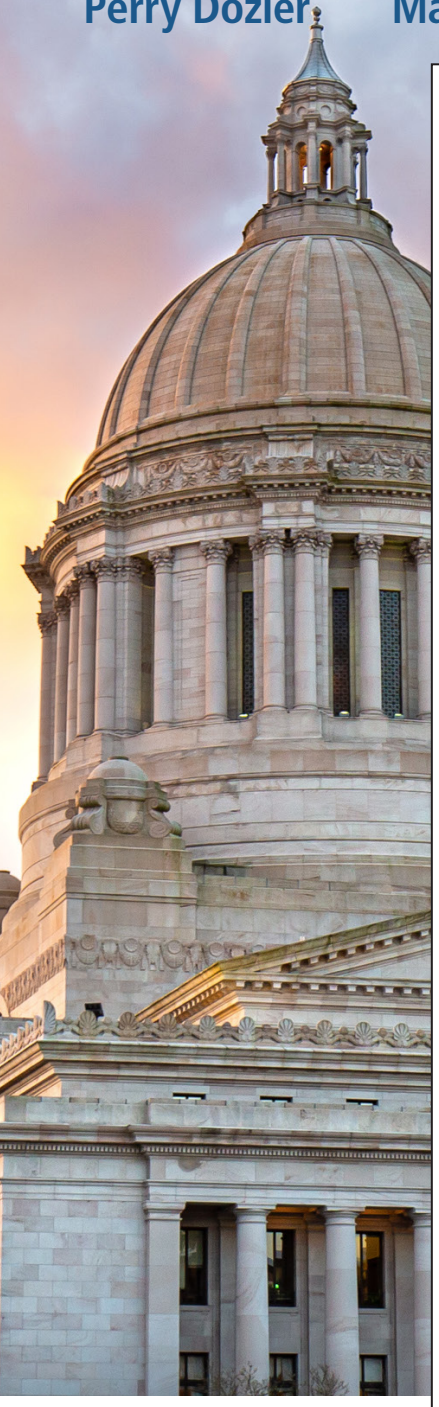
SENATOR
Perry Dozier

REPRESENTATIVE
Mark Klicker



REPRESENTATIVE
Skyler Rude

16th District Legislative Report



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

We went to Olympia for this year's 60-day legislative session with the goal of holding the line on spending and taxes, as part of making life in Washington more affordable. Leaders of the majority party arrived with a very different agenda: to adopt a state income tax.

By the time we adjourned March 12 they had followed through, despite knowing the voters of our state have rejected an income tax at every opportunity for more than 90 years.

We appreciate that the supplemental state operating budget includes money to anchor the financial plan that will keep the Prescott School District running. Unfortunately, there are many more reasons to be concerned. Total spending has been pushed over $80 billion, more than double what it was less than a decade ago. This year's $2.4 billion increase is being propped up by raiding funds meant for specific purposes, like first-responder pensions and public-works infrastructure.

As often happens, the supplemental budget for capital (construction) projects won unanimous approval. The transportation budget also passed, but differing opinions about the funding approach showed through in the final vote.

Efforts we supported to improve Washington's K-12 schools didn't get across the finish line, unfortunately, which can be attributed at least partly to this being a "short" nine-week session. On the public-safety front, the majority went in a puzzling direction that infringes on local control. And while legislation that could ease the shortage of housing in the more rural areas of our state became law, housing leaders in the Senate and House seemed more focused on passing a bill that would help convert old big-box buildings and vacant strip malls into housing.

If you have questions or concerns after reading through this report, please remember we want to hear from you. While the session is over, 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,

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2026 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

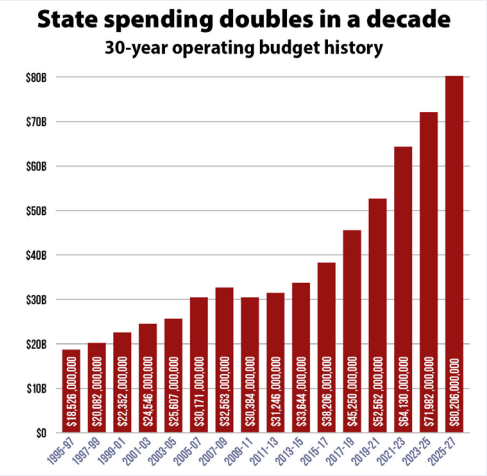
Unsustainable operating budget is like a 'House of Cards'

Although the largest package of tax and fee increases in state history ($12.3 billion over four years) was approved only a year ago, state government was looking at another shortfall in the operating budget when we returned to Olympia this year.

The response was a supplemental budget that **pushes spending above $80 billion** for the two-year cycle. The majority party enacted more than $100 million in additional taxes to help pay for it, but the real concern is the use of *one-time* dollars for *ongoing* expenses: almost $4 billion in all.

This includes draining the state's "rainy-day fund," diverting hundreds of millions meant for public infrastructure, and raiding a long-established fund for law-enforcement and firefighter pensions.

We voted no. Budget leaders on our side compare this approach to a house of cards, built on a shaky foundation. It's so unsustainable that **another shortfall of $7 billion to $10 billion** could hit in the next budget cycle, even with the new income tax.



November ballot to include citizen initiatives

Early in our 60-day session, the secretary of state certified two initiatives to the Legislature. The initiative labeled IL26-638 deals with the controversial issue of boys competing in girls' sports in school. The other, labeled IL26-001, focuses on parental rights in regard to students in schools.

Initiatives to the Legislature are different than initiatives to the people, which go straight to the ballot. When an initiative comes to us, we may adopt it as written, which makes it law; decide not to pass it, which automatically places the measure on the statewide ballot in November; or propose and approve an alternative initiative, in which case the original initiative and the alternative would both appear together on the ballot.

Majority leaders in the House and Senate chose not to take action on either measure. That includes no public hearing on either, so on Feb. 3, responding to the many citizens who expressed a desire to speak to lawmakers, Senate Republican members held a listening session at the Capitol on the two initiatives. House Republican members also held a listening session that day.

Because the Legislature did not take action on IL26-001 or IL26-638, they will appear on the statewide ballot this fall.

Transportation update

Green light for crash prevention zones

Our efforts to reduce collisions on the two-lane section of U.S. Highway 12 in our district got a big push from the passage of **Senate Bill 6066**. Rep. Klicker sponsored the House counterpart and Sen. Dozier was lead co-sponsor of the Senate bill.

Beginning June 11, when the law takes effect, local governments — with public input — may establish crash prevention zones on parts of U.S. 12 and U.S. 395. The zones will trigger engineering and traffic studies to identify safety improvements that can be made right away.

Transportation funding preserved

The state Department of Transportation secured $300 million for statewide road maintenance and repair, including repaving, and some of this will be used in the 16th District.

We maintained funding for key transportation projects, including safety improvements on U.S. 12:

- Matching funds to pursue federal dollars for replacing the U.S. 12 bridge over the Touchet River in Waitsburg.
- Design for Phase 8, the final 10-mile stretch between Nine Mile Hill and Wallula, of the project to widen U.S. 12 to four lanes.

We will keep working for state and federal funding to finally complete these vital safety projects.

2026 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Why we voted against a state income tax

Our state briefly had an income tax before the state Supreme Court overruled it – which was back *in 1933*. Since then, voters have said no to income-tax proposals 10 times, and the high court has done the same five more times.

When the majority party brought this latest income-tax proposal forward for a vote, we had many reasons to oppose it. Our overall concern was that an income tax on anyone in our state would eventually become an income tax on *everyone*.

Senate Bill 6346 is called a "tax on millionaires." It contains a million-dollar income deduction, but we see that as a marketing gimmick because the deduction is contained in a *single sentence*, meaning future legislators could lower it through a simple majority vote. We supported amendments to lock in the deduction but each was rejected.

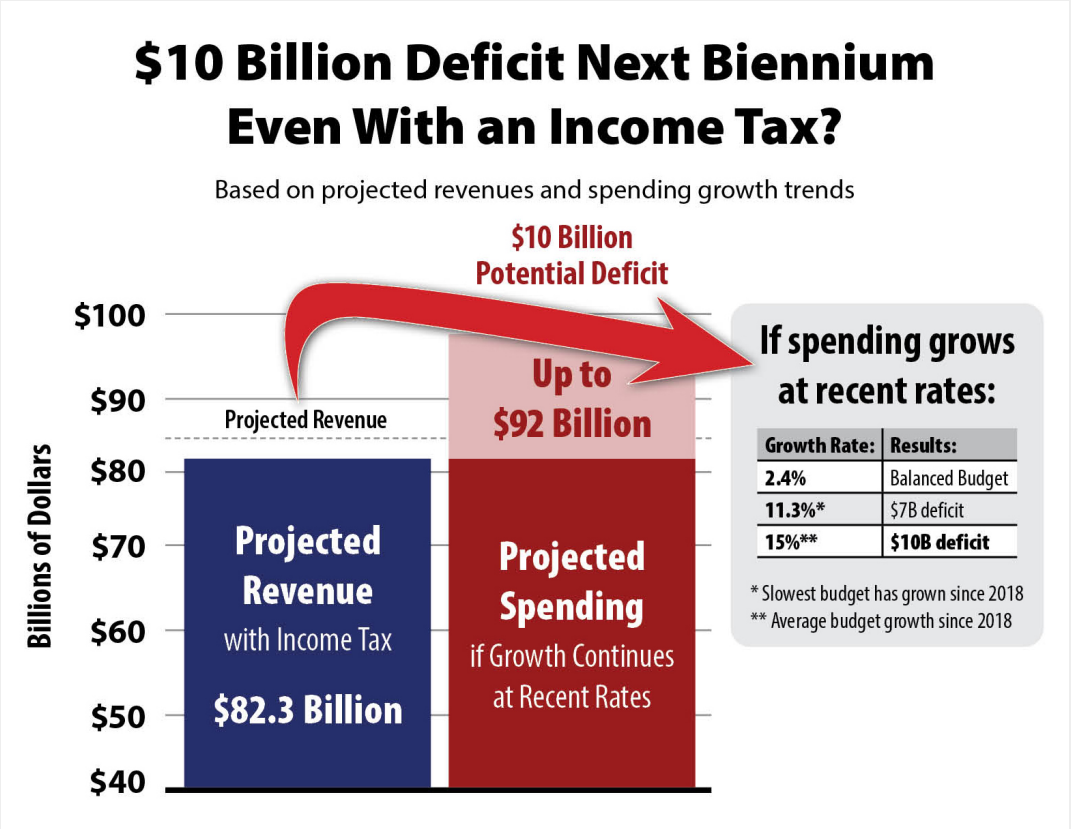
Our specific reasons for voting no begin with how the policy in SB 6346 clearly seems **unconstitutional**. Taxes are required to be the same (or "uniform") on the same class of property, and since that 1933 ruling, income has been considered property. The new 9.9% income tax doesn't treat all income the same.

We also felt it was **unfair** that SB 6346 includes language that blocks the people's constitutional right to reject new laws through a voter referendum. The amendments we supported to protect that right also were unsuccessful. (The right to a voter initiative is not affected, however.)

In addition, an income tax is **unnecessary**. State government is already collecting more tax dollars than ever. It has a spending problem, not a money problem. Olympia doesn't need another $3.2 billion each year to spend irresponsibly.

Those of us in the Senate and House who oppose the income tax fought it on multiple fronts. The Senate approach featured alerts that helped lead some 118,000 people to go online and let committee members know of their opposition – making SB 6346 the most **unpopular** bill ever seen in Olympia. The House approach culminated in a battle of speeches and amendments that was epic and unprecedented, lasting nearly 25 hours.

There are limits on what legislators can say in their official communications (like this report) about ballot measures, and voter initiatives were filed regarding the income tax as soon as the governor signed it. For that reason we'll close by saying that whatever is next for the income tax will happen outside of the legislative branch.



2026 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Capital budget update

We secured funding for capital projects supporting our communities, environment, infrastructure, and economic development. Sen. Dozier's work as assistant Republican leader was essential in making sure it carried through into the final version of the supplemental capital budget negotiated between the Senate and House.

- **$3.2 million** to finally clean up the estimated 7,100-ton tire pile near Twin Bridges Road in Richland. Some tires may be repurposed, and others will go to specialized landfills. The site will be redeveloped after cleanup.
- **$1.5 million** to restore fish passage for steelhead, bull trout, and spring chinook, including:
  - Remodeling the Mill Creek concrete channel between Colville and 3rd Avenue in Walla Walla.
  - Restoring a 1.4 mile area of the Touchet River downstream from Waitsburg.
- **$600,000** to replace the HVAC system at Richland's fiber hut, supporting broadband infrastructure for city operations and school districts.
- **$447,000** for the Kennewick Irrigation District's main canal lining project to reduce water loss and maintenance.
- **$258,000** for the Aspen Gardens housing design phase. This Walla Walla community will provide stable housing for up to 40 disabled adults.
- **$258,000** to develop an engineering master plan to expand the Reimann Industrial Center at the Port of Pasco to strengthen our region's manufacturing and logistics sectors.
- **$150,000** to renovate common areas, including kitchens and bathrooms, at the Richland Transitional Veterans Home.

Senator Dozier:

This was a disappointing session for those of us who care about controlling taxes and government spending – but if you're a fan of small school districts and like stories that have a happy ending, there was good news from Olympia this year.

I went to the Capitol determined to secure funding to help save the Prescott School District from closing its doors. Financial mismanagement had put Prescott in such a hole that the state superintendent of public instruction decided to pursue the dissolution of the district, which would force the students to travel longer distances to other schools. However, he left the door open for Prescott to get a stable financial plan together and avoid closure.

To make a long story short, I worked with Democrat budget leaders to have $630,000 earmarked for Prescott in the Senate's supplemental operating budget, and seek the same in the House version. Rep. Rude assisted on the House side, from his position on the Appropriations Committee, and it worked! All in all, it was a fantastic team effort that went well beyond the immediate area – but first and foremost, credit for keeping Prescott going belongs to the people of Prescott and Vista Hermosa. They never gave up. I happen to be a proud Prescott graduate myself, so – Go Tigers!

This was another successful year as a member of the Senate's capital-budget team (see the separate section on that). Also, two of my bills became law. One is **Senate Bill 6065**, which has to do with school transportation funding and will help Prescott's situation; the second (**Senate Bill 5862**) ensures the members of the state-run PERS/TRS 1 pension plans (and they know who they are) will get a cost-of-living-adjustment this year.

My legislation to improve financial management at small schools fell short, for reasons I am still trying to learn. **Senate Bill 6247** won unanimous approval in the Senate but couldn't make it through the House. I won't give up, because this is a way to help other school districts avoid what happened to Prescott.

2026 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

Representative Rude:

This year was a record-breaking session where we debated critical legislation about our schools, our tax system, public safety, and our constitution. Whether fighting harmful legislation or working to bring home wins for our district, I am proud of the work our delegation did this session.

Budget relief for schools: Unfunded legislative mandates and costly administrative burdens have been consistently raised as major concerns by school districts in our region.

In an effort to address that problem, I introduced **House Bill 2636**, which would have created a permanent review process to identify ineffective, costly K-12 policies for reform so that districts can focus their funds on serving students. The bill passed out of the House unanimously but ran out of time in the Senate.

I was also able to work with Democratic colleagues to lighten the impact of some of the proposed K-12 funding reductions which hit rural districts the hardest.

Improving the operating budget: Of 33 House Republican amendments to the supplemental operating budget proposed in the House Appropriations Committee, only one was adopted – an amendment I introduced to cap license-fee increases for birth centers. With proposed hikes of over 400%, this measure limits increases to 40%, supporting providers and preserving access to care in our region.

Leading the fight: As Assistant Republican Floor Leader, I helped lead strategy on some of the most consequential floor debates in recent memory. In one of the most challenging, House Republicans fought for nearly 25 hours straight against a state income tax – the longest continuous floor debate in state history. While we were unable to kill the bill, we were able to get amendments adopted and, more importantly, forced the majority to abandon several other bills as the end of session neared.

While our defensive tactics couldn't kill all the bad legislation pushed through this year, House Republicans blocked many of the majority's bad bills. This was accomplished by introducing and debating hundreds of amendments, garnering record-breaking support from constituents, and utilizing creative parliamentary strategies on the House floor.

As we look to the months and sessions ahead, we need to remain focused on supporting our student and families, ensuring Washington can recruit and retain job creators, and making sure Washington is a safe place to live, work, and retire.

Representative Klicker:

This session, I focused on making our district safer and more affordable.

Increase affordability, not spending and taxes: We started the session with a budget deficit. The problem is not a lack of revenue, it's overspending. State spending has more than doubled in the past decade and now exceeds our revenue.

I sponsored **House Bill 2175** to exempt durable medical equipment charities from paying state retail sales and use taxes. These nonprofits provide crucial equipment for free to people in need. The bill had broad support, but it did not pass by the deadline.

After over 24 hours of continuous House debate, the majority party passed legislation to create a state income tax. I opposed this because it provides no meaningful relief for middle- or lower-income taxpayers while also discouraging investment in our state. Although the tax initially applies to people making over $1 million, I do not believe it will stay that way.

Our communities are already struggling with the high cost of living, and I will keep working to make life in Washington more affordable.

Safer roads: I am disheartened by the serious collisions on our local roadways. I sponsored **House Bill 2174** to improve safety now while we work for sufficient state and federal funding to finish widening U.S. 12 to four lanes and improve U.S. 395. The Senate companion bill passed. **Starting in June, local governments — and only with public input — can establish Crash Prevention Zones** on certain parts of U.S. 12 and U.S. 395 to study how to make roads safer.

Let communities decide on sheriffs: I opposed legislation to allow a governor-appointed commission to effectively remove an elected sheriff from office. Our local communities must maintain their autonomy, and the state should trust them to oversee their own officials.

Growing energy: I cosponsored **House Joint Memorial 4016** to urge the state to partner with the federal government on advanced nuclear energy. This is **not** your grandad's nuclear power — it's safer and more efficient. We must increase our energy production to meet growing demands while also protecting delicate wildlife habitats.

My priorities will continue to be making Washington an affordable and enjoyable place to live.

16th District Legislative Report

SENATOR **Perry Dozier** | REPRESENTATIVE **Mark Klicker** | REPRESENTATIVE **Skyler Rude**

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Contact Your 16th 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 16th District legislators.

Sen. Perry Dozier
Deputy Republican Whip

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