Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This year’s legislative session adjourned March 10. It was one of the busiest, and most intense, 60-day sessions in recent memory. Much like last year, this session featured 100% remote committee testimony with some in-person floor action.

Our focus as House Republicans this year was making life more affordable, protecting our communities and families, holding state government accountable and attempting to rein in the governor’s emergency powers authority, and empowering parents to help their children succeed.

This session had a different tone than others in the past. While Democratic legislators have controlled all the bases of power in the Legislature since 2018, in past sessions, the Democratic majority has been fairly willing to collaborate with the minority. That was not the case this year. Overly ambitious spending plans disregarded fiscal discipline by spending historic budget surpluses, and the Legislature resumed practices that have proven to cause serious financial problems during economic recessions.

Our state saw unprecedented economic revenue growth with a $15 billion surplus. We also saw the largest supplemental operating budget in state history. This budget spends too much and does little to strengthen the rainy-day fund. It does not provide meaningful tax relief in a time of skyrocketing inflation. Budgets aren’t just about numbers - they reflect the values we believe should be upheld in financing our obligations responsibly.

Finally, we are happy to be back in the beautiful 16th District. Please contact us with your questions, concerns, and comments on issues important to you. If you would like us to visit your community group, school, or business, please contact us to make arrangements.

It has been our honor to represent and serve the people of the 16th District and be your voice in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Skyler Rude
State Representative

Mark Klicker
State Representative
LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE PROGRAM AND PAYROLL TAX

In January, Gov. Jay Inslee signed into law House Bill 1732, which delays the implementation of the 2019 long-term care insurance program, including the associated .58% payroll tax. While the program remains financially insolvent, unpopular, and structurally flawed, this will at least give us time to fix or eliminate the program next session.

While acknowledging the need for real solutions to the increasing cost of long-term care, we supported House Bill 1913 to stabilize rates and expand access to long-term care insurance in the private market. It is important all ideas and thoughts are considered while we work to ensure those in need of long-term care can access affordable, quality coverage.

PUBLIC SAFETY

One of our priorities this session was to work to strengthen our communities by making public safety a priority and supporting effective community policing. We needed to fix the damage from last year’s law enforcement legislation (House Bills 1310 and 1054) that caused so much confusion and put our peace officers and our communities at risk.

Lawmakers passed three bills that will mitigate some of the mistakes from 2021. House Bills 1719, 1735, and 2037 will improve officers’ abilities to make quick decisions, de-escalate dangerous situations, help people experiencing a mental health crisis, and clarify when use of force is allowed.

Our Republican colleagues also offered amendments to the supplemental operating budget, hoping to allocate $100 million in unspent federal stimulus dollars to provide a funding boost to law enforcement. Unfortunately, our amendments were rejected.

The amendments included:
• $5,000 signing and retention bonuses.
• $90,000 in grants for local law enforcement agencies for body camera costs.
• Funding for 10 Basic Law Enforcement Academy classes in each fiscal year, for a total of 25 classes per year.

Our 16th District delegation also took the lead in seeking formal attorney general opinions, at the request of area law enforcement, to provide uniform legal guidance on how to interpret complex and sometimes contradictory laws passed in 2021. That guidance is expected to be issued in the next several months.

EMERGENCY POWERS REFORM

This session had two opportunities to address emergency powers reform – House Bill 1772 and Senate Bill 5909 – which would have provided accountability for the governor’s use of emergency powers.

• HB 1772 was the more substantial bill that would terminate a state of emergency after 60 days unless extended by the Legislature, rather than the governor.
• SB 5909 was known as “emergency powers light” but was better than nothing. It passed the Senate chamber with bipartisan support. It was brought to the House floor, where during the amendment process, the speaker of the House stopped debate on the bill after 20 minutes. It was never brought back up for a vote.

Unfortunately, the session concluded without any emergency powers reform. We missed an opportunity, especially with the pandemic winding down and life returning to normal. There’s absolutely no reason our state should still be under a “state of emergency” with the governor making many decisions by himself.
EDUCATION IS ALWAYS ONE OF MY TOP PRIORITIES
by Rep. Skyler Rude

As a member of the House Education Committee, our students, parents, and school system will always be a priority and passion of mine. I have always been an advocate for an educational system that tailors learning environments to meet the needs of a diverse student population. This session, I co-sponsored House Bill 1591, with Rep. Laurie Dolan (a Democrat from Olympia), to provide additional funding to charter schools to improve access to extracurricular activities and enrichments for students. This bill would provide funding parity for public charter school students, many of whom come from low-income families and face additional challenges. In 2021, I offered an amendment to the budget that was similar to this bill, but it was removed in final negotiations. While HB 1591 did not make it across the finish line, it served as a vehicle to secure additional funding in the operating budget that accomplishes the goals of HB 1591.

As part of the House Republicans comprehensive 2022 transportation funding plan, I introduced House Bill 1607 which would investigate a shift of the Safe Routes to School Program to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) with direction to better coordinate funding with WSDOT for safe pathways to school and a stable funding stream. I was disappointed the bill was not considered. While the funding source for this program remains the transportation budget, we were able to include an additional $10 million for the program — a big win for student safety.

It’s important for parents, students, and the public to have access to school board meetings in an effort to help keep parents involved in their children’s education. I introduced House Bill 1973 to increase school board meeting access. My bill would have required school boards to record and make available to the public audio recordings for each meeting. The records would be searchable by date and available for five years. My bill unanimously passed the House but failed in the Senate.

CLEAN ENERGY FACILITIES IN RURAL WASHINGTON
by Rep. Mark Klicker

I introduced five bills this session, three of which received public hearings in their respective committees. The majority party declined to vote on these bills. However, about 90% of one of my bills, House Bill 1871, did make it to the governor’s desk in the form of an amendment to House Bill 1812.

Together with other members of the House Environment and Energy Committee, I worked in good faith with members across the aisle to get this amendment included in the final bill. It called for a study of the costs and benefits of energy projects expected to be sited in rural communities over the next 30 years, and for a legislative task force to consider the study.

The amendment arose out of concerns that Washington is being divided into clean energy producing counties and clean energy consuming counties as most of the burden of siting large-scale wind and solar farms is falling solely on a few of the less populous counties.

HB 1812 passed both chambers with the amendment included, which was a major victory for Republican lawmakers and people living in rural Washington. Unfortunately, the governor vetoed the sections of the bill that included the policies from the amendment. Without those changes in place, rural stakeholders will have no input in the project siting review.

The governor missed a historic opportunity to build a broader consensus around his clean energy strategy. This is a huge loss for people in rural Washington. It would have been great to receive a report with a forecast of what the full build-out of wind and solar facilities over the next 30 years would look like for rural counties. But the governor’s decision means that won’t happen.
SESSION SCORECARD

WINS THIS YEAR

✔ Provided clarification and definitions for our law enforcement professionals as minor fixes to the flawed police reform bills of 2021 through House Bills 1719, 1735, and 2037.

✔ Passed a bipartisan supplemental capital budget providing more than $1.5 billion in public works projects statewide, including nearly $2 million in additional funding for the 16th District.

✔ Established programs and measures to prevent suicide among veterans and military members through House Bill 1181.

... AND A FEW DISAPPOINTMENTS

✖ Nothing was done to rein in the governor’s emergency powers authority. Two bills were introduced to restore balance and trust in state government – House Bill 1772 and Senate Bill 5909.

✖ Despite a historic $15 billion surplus, there was not any meaningful tax relief, including a one-day sales tax holiday. The supplemental operating budget is the largest in state history.

✖ Lack of bipartisanship. The $17 billion transportation package is partisan, raises fees on Washingtonians, and ignores many parts of our state. No money was included for the completion of the U.S. Highway 12 widening project from the Snake River to Walla Walla.

Since it is an election year, we are restricted from sending out any more legislative communications this year. However, we are allowed to respond to constituents who contact us. If you have any comments, questions, or concerns for either of us, please feel free to call or email and we’ll respond as soon as we can.