



32nd District



2012 Legislative Wrap-up



Dear Neighbors:

This is the second year in a row we are sending out a joint legislative report in order to conserve resources and limit the amount of paper you receive in your mailbox.

Over the past three years, the Legislature has cut a total of \$10.5 billion in state spending in order to deal with ongoing budget challenges brought on by the Great Recession.

In fact, no other Legislature in our state's history has cut or reformed more than we have since 2008.

Some think these cuts are not "real," calling them "reductions in expected spending" instead. But as our state's population continues to grow, the services the public expects must keep up with this growth. At the same time, inflation means costs go up each year, even if population does not. So the same services cost more each year to provide. These cuts have felt very real to the men and women who deliver services to the public – our teachers, corrections officers and social workers. Additionally, two voter-approved initiatives to increase spending for education (Initiatives 728 and 732) have not been funded, and count as "cuts" since they are expenditures that ordinarily would have been made.

Despite facing some grim scenarios with our state budget a few months ago, we are very pleased and relieved at the outcome of this year's legislative session. We balanced the budget with **NO CUTS** to K-12 or Higher Education. We also **PROTECTED THE SAFETY NET** for our most vulnerable citizens. We passed a **JOBS PACKAGE** that creates thousands of jobs across the state immediately. We even **CLOSED TWO TAX LOOPHOLES** to bring in some extra revenue.

Better yet, we're seeing hopeful signs that our economy is beginning to rebound. Our state added 3,000 jobs in March, and Boeing's decision to build the next-generation 737 here means there will be more jobs coming in the near future.

As always, it is an honor to serve as your state representatives. We're happy to answer any questions you may have, or listen to your feedback about the job we're doing.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ruth Kagi

Rep. Cindy Ryu



Marriage equality

In a victory for equal rights, Washington became the seventh state in the nation to authorize marriage equality this year. Both of us were very proud to vote in favor of this measure, which gives gay and lesbian couples the right to marry under state law. The freedom to choose who we love and share our lives with is one of the most fundamental freedoms of all, and every child deserves to grow up in a society where his or her parents' relationship is recognized for what it is – a marriage.



Toll Free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

Hearing Impaired Hotline:

1-800-635-9993



State Representative
Ruth Kagi

District Phone:

(206) 216-3186

Olympia Office:

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7910

E-mail:

Ruth.Kagi@leg.wa.gov

2012 Committees:

- Early Learning & Human Services (Chair)
- Health & Human Services Appropriations & Oversight
- Ways & Means

Supporting children's transition into kindergarten

The first day of kindergarten is a big day for a child. I remember accompanying each of my own children on that first day of their school journeys, feeling both proud and a little nostalgic at the passing of time.

Wouldn't it be great if every single child entered kindergarten fully supported by a teacher who already knew the child's cognitive, social/emotional, language and physical strengths and needs? There's a process already underway in our state called WaKIDS – the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills. It began as a voluntary pilot program and is now being phased in across the state. In the near future, 70,000 incoming kindergarteners will be assessed each year, and teachers and parents will work together to make sure each child is able to develop his or her potential. I mentioned WaKIDS in my 2011 newsletter, and am pleased to report that a bill I sponsored this year speeds up statewide implementation of this valuable assessment tool.

We're speeding up WaKIDS implementation because our state was awarded a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant worth \$60 million [see box below]!



On Children's Day in the Legislature, kids are honored with a resolution on the House floor.

Historic child welfare reforms signed into law

Thanks to three pieces of legislation that passed this year, our state is shifting from simply providing services to improving the outcomes for families in crisis. I sponsored bills that:

- Maintain child welfare funding for the next five years, even if fewer children enter the foster care system. Any savings would be reinvested in programs that support families in crisis and help keep children out of foster care if possible.
- Institute performance-based contracting in child welfare. This brings cohesion to the fragmented network of contracted child welfare providers, which means greater accountability for how services are provided and dollars are spent.



- Allow Child Protective Services ways to utilize a family assessment process by 2014 to address child maltreatment - without always having to remove a child from the family home. Studies have shown that the majority of child abuse allegations are really child neglect, and these can be addressed by engaging with the family and keeping parent and child together, if there is no imminent threat of physical harm or sexual abuse of the child.

We won!

Last December, our state got some wonderful news: we won a \$60 million federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant. Washington's implementation of a number of innovative early learning reforms since 2007 helped position us to receive this funding. It was truly a collective effort by policy makers and early learning advocates, and is very promising for the future of education in our state.



Supporting education

Some lawmakers dislike the Supreme Court's McCleary ruling that Washington must do more to meet our constitutional duty to fully fund basic education. I applauded the decision and was among those who insisted there must be no further budget cuts to schools or colleges.

Fortunately, we prevailed, this time. But we simply cannot consistently fully fund schools without new revenues. That is why I'm calling for sweeping reforms of tax loopholes that are draining our treasury with virtually no scrutiny.



House Bill 2762 proposes a public vote on our plan to review 251 tax exemptions and require them to be reauthorized in order to stay on the books. Tax-exemptions cost Washington \$1.9 billion each year, and many of them make no sense—including the mortgage tax-break for out-of-state banks that I fought successfully to repeal this year with bipartisan support. Our larger reform didn't pass this session, but the *Seattle Times* called it a "solid plan," and we'll keep working on it. It's time to restore Washington's tradition of amply funding education!

Protecting privacy

I'm proud to be a leader in protecting privacy rights and I'm happy to report we made good progress this year.

- I was able to add strict privacy protections to the law that allows state licensing officials to use facial-recognition technology. This technology fights fraud and identity theft by detecting illegal possession of multiple drivers' licenses, but we needed strong privacy safeguards to ensure it is not abused.
- A new law I sponsored allows victims of electronic impersonation to sue imposters who steal identities and engage in fraud or ugly slander at sites like Facebook and Craig's List.
- New privacy protections for domestic-violence victims make it a crime to intentionally reveal their locations or safe houses. I championed this law to make it harder for abusers to hunt down and harm their victims again.
- Law enforcement agencies collect personal information about citizens who have security alarm systems or who are in crime-watch programs. Incredibly, this information (which may include who has keys to your house!) was considered a public record that anyone can see. Fortunately, another law I sponsored exempts this private information from the Public Records Act.

What's next? Some employers are requiring job-applicants and employees to reveal their passwords to Facebook and other social-networking sites. I hope to outlaw this outrageous violation of privacy. If you have ideas for protecting the right to privacy, please let me know.



State Representative
Cindy Ryu

District Office:

15031 Aurora Ave. N.
Shoreline, WA 98133
(206) 366-2618

Olympia Office:

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7880

E-mail:

Cindy.Ryu@leg.wa.gov

2012 Committees:

- Business & Financial Services
- Community & Economic Development & Housing
- Rules
- Transportation

Restoring air rescue services

Life-saving air rescue and evacuation services stopped serving Washington residents when a technicality reclassified their contracts as insurance policies—making them subject to lawsuits and expensive new regulations. I worked with the Insurance Commissioner's office and others to write a new law that protects consumers of air-rescue services without adding a costly layer of regulations. We struck the right balance. My bill passed unanimously and the companies will soon serve Washingtonians again.

Rep. Ruth Kagi
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P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



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Community Investments:

We proudly supported the Jobs Now Act that makes smart investments in capital bonds to employ about 18,000 construction workers on key projects. Low interest rates and project bids make this an ideal time to invest in public infrastructure, and we worked with local leaders to tailor investments to meet local needs.

- The City of Kenmore needed state assistance to help local commuters cope with increased traffic on SR-522 (a result of SR 520 tolls). We secured funding that will improve traffic flow by upgrading traffic signals and modernizing the intersection at SR 522 and 61st Avenue NE.
- Edmonds requested and received important state help for the Edmonds Main Street Project. The \$500,000 state investment will help Edmonds to make downtown even more inviting by widening sidewalks, installing street lights, putting unsightly overhead power lines underground, and making the whole area more pedestrian-friendly.
- State public works funds will help the Lake Forest Park Water District to improve its water-treatment capacity. The project will also move facilities away from sensitive wetlands and reduce flood risks to SR-522, a local fire station, the Lake Forest Park Town Center and more than 25 nearby homes.



Photo courtesy City of Lake Forest Park

Please visit our websites:

www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/roster/rep-ruth-kagi

www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/roster/rep-cindy-ryu

