

Speaker Laurie Jinkins
2022 Legislative Session
Opening Day Speech – remarks as prepared

“Let’s Move Forward”

Members of the House, people of the great state of Washington –
Welcome to the 2022 legislative session.

And a special welcome to the newest member of this body, the good member from the 44th District.

Rep. Donaghy, thank you for serving your community, and bringing your voice and lived experience to the People’s House to help make our state better for everyone.

Our time together this session is short and the list of what we all hope to accomplish is long. It will take all 98 of us in this chamber listening to each other, and working together, to tackle the challenges our state faces, whether it’s the economy, housing, transportation, health care, racial equity or climate change.

Before I go further, I want to take a moment to acknowledge a recent loss in our legislative family.

Sen. Ericksen passed away just before the holidays. My condolences go out to his wife and daughters.

My heart goes out to all who have suffered the loss of loved ones.
To all who are currently battling this deadly virus at home or in hospitals.
To all who are suffering from the debilitating effects of long COVID.

And to all the front-line workers across our state, especially our health care and public health workers –

You continue to take care of your fellow Washingtonians under the most challenging of circumstances.

I see you, and I see the enormous strain you are under.

My sister-in-law, Sarah, is a family practice physician. She just returned to work after having contracted COVID.

I know there are so many Sarahs out there, risking their own health to care for patients and save lives. That's why we need to make sure we're taking care of our health care and public health workers, doing what we can to protect you, whether it's from the virus or from burnout,

and to address other issues in our health care system like the shortage of nurses and behavioral health workers.

Just a few short weeks ago, I looked forward to seeing more faces in this chamber today.

Most members of this chamber were vaccinated, boosted, and ready to be here in person.

Then the rapid spread of omicron called for a change of plans, so we rose to the occasion and adapted quickly.

It's what we do as Washingtonians.

We adapt.

We support each other and our communities.

And we keep MOVING FORWARD.

We've recovered from hard times before. Many of us were here during the Great Recession.

But to be candid, previous recoveries haven't brought everyone along.

We've advantaged some folks, while others have been left behind.

Our working families have been overlooked time and again.

NO MORE!

This session, we will MOVE FORWARD for EVERYONE.

Because that's what we're here to do.

We can take steps closer to the Washington we all envision.

A place where neighbors recognize and rely on each other.

A place where EVERYONE recovers from this pandemic in a healthier and more economically resilient way.

A place where the services Washington provides get to everyone in a way they can use them to better their lives.

A place where our communities are more racially just and equitable.

And a place where we can relax and recreate in Washington's natural beauty rather than fighting the effects of extreme weather events like wildfires and flooding.

We have huge opportunities because what we initially feared would be a budget shortfall that would dwarf the Great Recession turned into better and better news with each revenue forecast.

Washingtonians have come together in these trying times to support local small businesses and restaurants.

It was great to walk around Tacoma on Small Business Saturday and see the buzz of activity as people went in and out of local shops, purchasing toys, home furnishings, clothes, specialty foods, coffee and, for me, freshly-made butterscotch cashews.

I spent some time over the interim meeting with members in their districts. It was fun to join them outdoors for a bite to eat or a cup of coffee, from Bellingham to Spokane to Vancouver.

At every café or eatery, folks were eagerly showing up to spend their dollars locally. In Port Townsend, the outdoor "streateries" that have helped restaurants weather the pandemic have been such a hit the city has extended them through May.

Thanks to all this local spending, and thanks to one-time funding from the federal government, our state currently finds itself in a strong fiscal position.

When we work on this session's budget, my pledge to you is this: WE WILL PUT WORKING FAMILIES FIRST.

ALL our families, in every district, deserve the opportunity to MOVE FORWARD and make some headway finally.

Let's MOVE FORWARD when it comes to making sure everyone has a safe, affordable place to live. A home.

Last session, we took critical steps on housing with \$1 billion dollars in rental assistance and hundreds of millions more for mortgage assistance, homelessness response, and permanent housing supports.

Yet there is still work to be done, with a shortage of almost a quarter of million homes.

Let's MOVE FORWARD to close that gap.

Let's make sure we're providing wrap-around services to get people off the street and into more permanent, stable housing and employment.

Let's MOVE FORWARD by providing accelerated learning to help our K-12 students who fell behind during remote learning.

Our students, teachers, and school employees have faced enormous challenges over the past two years and it has taken a toll, so let's address the critical need for more mental health services in our schools.

Let's help all families MOVE FORWARD by making college more affordable.

The Washington College Grant is one of the most important things our state has done in years to help families afford a college education. But not everyone qualifies for it, so let's consider even more options,

like an affordable student loan program with an interest rate of just one percent.

And letting students use the grant for more expenses.

Let's invest in worker retraining for people who are looking for something new in the post-pandemic economy.

Let's MOVE FORWARD by bringing down the cost of health care for EVERYONE.

It's hard enough to pay for medical expenses you can plan for, but unexpected medical bills can totally derail a family's finances.

Let's help more people avoid medical bankruptcy by putting an end to surprise billing.

Let's MOVE FORWARD to address the climate crisis.

If you wondered about the effects of climate change and extreme weather, just look at the flooding north and south of here and the wildfires now with us from spring to winter.

We didn't reach this crisis point overnight. And we can't solve it overnight.

But it's not enough to say we're going to adapt to climate change, to learn to live with flooding in Sumas and wildfires that destroy towns like Malden.

We can, and must, take action to fight climate change and make our state a place with less pollution and more clean energy. A place with fewer floods and wildfires.

We already know we can MOVE FORWARD. Last year we got the clean fuels bill across the finish line, after so many years of coming up short.

We got the Climate Commitment Act through.

Let's keep MOVING FORWARD by making our buildings healthier, our cars healthier, our heating and cooling systems healthier, and our transportation systems healthier.

Let's do better when it comes to our state parks. More people are visiting our outdoor spaces for socially-distanced recreation. We should have a world-class parks system for EVERYONE to enjoy here in the Evergreen state.

Let's make sure that those who have been knocked down during this pandemic don't just get back on their feet, but are able to MOVE FORWARD. That they end up further along than they were before.

Let's build on our successes from last year, like the Working Families Tax Rebate that put more money directly in the pockets of Washingtonians who need it most.

Let's do the things in our power to reduce the cost of living and keep goods moving fast.

Now, there are some who think real progress is impossible. That we can't solve our biggest challenges and should be content to nibble at the edges.

That if we don't get something fully done the first time, we should give up and get rid of it entirely.

That is not my belief. That is not why I am here.

We serve in this chamber to tackle the hard problems. To help our neighbors, our communities.

To make things better.

Better for the small businesses and restaurants still struggling to make it.

Better for our front-line health care workers and patients while our hospitals deal with waves of COVID cases.

Better for every family struggling to pay rent, or buy their first home—or have a safe place to sleep at all.

Better for teachers and students who are struggling to find stability in this pandemic.

Better for people burdened by the high cost of college, or by long commutes to work each day stuck in traffic.

Or by fear of what may happen during a law enforcement interaction.

Or by the inability to access long-term care without first spending themselves into poverty and losing everything they have worked hard for their entire lives.

Whew, I'm outing myself as a kid of the '80's because I'm reminded of a song from the movie *Smokey and the Bandit*: "We've got a long way to go and a short time to get there."

But here in the People's House, we come together and we make things better.

We have 60 days.

Let's start MOVING FORWARD.