

Speaker Laurie Jinkins  
2023 Legislative Session  
Opening Day Speech - Remarks as prepared

“Our Common Ground”

Thank you, Chairman Frank, for welcoming us all to the ancestral homeland of the sovereign tribes, starting what I hope to be a new tradition here.

We acknowledge tribal nations as the original stewards of this land, and the history of dispossession that enabled the eventual construction of this very building we now gather in.

We are honored to have you and Chairman Peters of the Squaxin Tribe here today, along with other tribal members from the Nisqually and Squaxin tribes. Please stand so we can recognize you.

I look forward to our continued government-to-government partnership here in the People’s House.

Thank you, Rep. Fitzgibbon.

And thank you to the members of the House for placing your confidence in me.

I promise to do my best to meet that confidence with listening, hard work and good policy.

Rep. Harris thank you to the good member from the 17th for lifting us all up with that wonderful rendition of the national anthem.

Reverend Christopher, your motivating and inspirational words set the tone for the work we will undertake here over the next several months.

I'm so grateful you were able to be here today, my friend, and wish you all the best as you plan for your retirement later this year.

Today I'm going to talk about family -- both my own family and our legislative one.

About how this chamber and this institution are growing and transforming, just like our state.

About why I know we can deliver results for the people of Washington.

About the challenges confronting us.

And about how all of us in this chamber, from every corner of the state, can work together.

The last time I delivered remarks to a packed House, with actual visitors in the galleries, was on the opening day of the 2020 session -- my first as Speaker of the House.

At the time, none of us knew that within weeks a global pandemic would completely change how we work, socialize, and live our lives.

Many of my family members traveled from out of state to see me sworn in back in 2020, which was very special for me.

This year, many of them have returned to the gallery: My sister Julie, my sister-in-law Tobey, my niece Sasha, my sister-in-law Glenda and her husband, my backpacking buddy, Jim.

My brother Todd is here from Boise too. Some of you may recall Todd worked as a smokejumper. In January of 2020, he was fighting catastrophic wildfires in Australia. I'm forever in awe of his courage, and so pleased that he has retired and can fully enjoy being a grandfather to Rory.

One person who isn't here and is incredibly missed is my dad, Jack Jinkins. He passed away in 2020, and I am so incredibly grateful he was able to be here for opening ceremonies that year and meet so many of you.

And, I'm happy to have my mom, Donna, joining me at the dais today.

My parents' role modeling of what it means to live in a small town and rely on each other to get things done, even if we didn't always agree on everything, has been integral to my work in the legislature.

I also want to acknowledge another loss, not in my immediate family but our legislative one. This past fall Jamie Walsh, wife of Rep. Jim Walsh, tragically lost her life in a car accident.

Jim, we may not always agree on policy. But every single member of this chamber is deeply saddened by your loss. We are keeping you and your family in our thoughts during these incredibly difficult times.

Family is so important, and I couldn't do this work without the incredible, loving support, advice and sometimes stern talkings-to from my partner of nearly 34 years and wife of nearly 10 years, Laura, and our son Wulf, who's graduating soon from Western Washington University.

Thank you both for letting me model the ability to love your family and love your work at the same time.

In my time as Speaker, we held not one, but two, mostly remote legislative sessions, a historic first, and hopefully last, for our state.

I recognize that for some legislators, this may not be your first term, but it is your first-ever opening day ceremony in person. You've never experienced this before, and I am so glad you finally get to.

I also want to welcome the 23 new legislators now officially members of this body. I'm excited to work with all of you!

Look around: the makeup of this chamber is more diverse than ever, and that's something to celebrate. Because the People's House SHOULD reflect the diversity of this great state.

Washingtonians sent more women and people of color from every corner of the state here to work together on solutions to our most pressing issues.

Their trust has once again been placed in us to get the job done over the next 105 days.

And we will deliver.

We know we can because this Legislature delivered during some of the most challenging, unprecedented times our state has ever experienced.

We delivered with the Washington Recovery Budget, to help working families, communities, and small businesses, particularly those hit hardest by the pandemic and who faced the greatest barriers to recovery.

We delivered with billions of dollars in rent assistance, mortgage assistance, and utility assistance to keep folks housed and warm through the pandemic.

We delivered with a transformational, 16-year transportation package, Move Ahead Washington, that creates a sustainable and achievable future for our state.

We delivered with the Fair Start for Kids Act, supporting our youngest learners, their working parents, and our economy that relies on the success of both to run smoothly.

We delivered with support for our K-12 schools, funding more school counselors and psychologists, more school nurses, and more social workers to help our students.

We delivered with Apple Health and Homes, to bring stable housing and community support services to our neighbors suffering from chronic homelessness.

We delivered with the Climate Commitment Act, to limit greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pollution in overburdened communities, and invest in clean jobs and climate resilience.

And we delivered with the Working Families Tax Credit, putting money back in the pockets of hundreds of thousands of working families in our state.

We did all this and more, so much more, through two mostly remote sessions, keeping the health of our staff, the public, and each other at the forefront at all times.

We can be proud that our legislature did not have to shut down or pause operations due to Covid, unlike many other states.

We can be proud of how Washington weathered the last two years, with our economy ranked best in the nation last year by Wallet Hub, and the second-best state for business according to CNBC.

But we know that those rankings do not tell the whole story.

Even with our strong economy, there are families across Washington who are struggling, and there is still more work to do to fully deliver on our successes.

One of the things people need our help with is housing.

Washington state needs about 1.1 million new homes built within the next couple of decades.

Almost half of those homes are needed for people with very low or extremely low incomes, a market the private sector has not ever been able to serve and that will not be served without public funding.

We have a big need for more housing of all kinds, in every corner of our state.

There is no single solution.

There are many different ways to get there, and it will take creative, innovative and bipartisan approaches to address the complexity of the problem.

But I'm confident we can do this because the last few years have been all about finding creative and innovative solutions.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that a microscopic virus can completely upend the global economy and force us to rethink everything.

Largely because of baby boomers launched into earlier retirements by COVID, we're confronting a changing workforce landscape, which has exposed some dire needs in many sectors.

In fact, no sector has been unaffected by workforce challenges.

The last couple of years, we've focused our energy trying to help folks come out of the pandemic better than they went in.



And even though we did it better than almost everyone else, there's still more to be done.

So much of it comes back to workforce.

Look, we can build the best behavioral health treatment centers in communities all over our state, but without enough staff those beds will remain empty and people won't get the care they need.

We can't provide critical health care to communities if hospitals are struggling with staffing issues and staff are weary to the bone.

We can't help parents access child care and give businesses more certainty without enough child care workers.

We can't give our kids the education they deserve without fixing the statewide shortage of teachers, counselors and school nurses.

We can't care for an aging population and support families caring for loved ones if we don't have enough people in the long-term care workforce.

And we can't adequately address public safety in our communities if our law enforcement agencies – from our State Patrol to local police departments – struggle to fill positions.

All of that is to say, this session is going to be about Washington's workforce.

Because it affects every sector, every district, every corner of the state.

Rural and urban, east and west, from agricultural workers to high-tech workers.

This is an all-hands-on-deck issue. Bipartisan, bicameral – we all need to be aggressive and creative, working together to solve our workforce challenges.

And I am confident we can, because over the past few weeks I've met with nearly every freshman lawmaker from both sides of the aisle.

What I've heard about is a desire for bipartisanship and working together.

We may not always agree on everything, but these new legislators are ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work on finding common ground.

That's refreshing and promising for the next 105 days of this session.

We've heard for some time that our nation is deeply divided, mired in gridlock and partisan bickering.

Heck, we just witnessed partisan bickering never seen in our lifetimes in the other Washington.

I don't want to minimize the divisions that are out there. Immigrant communities, transgender youth, and the right to bodily autonomy for every single one of us are all being attacked in an effort to stoke fires of fear and partisanship.

But in THIS Washington, even if we disagree on these topics, our conversations WILL recognize the humanity of EVERY person. They WILL be respectful and civil, and we WILL find ways to protect the rights of every Washingtonian, in every corner of the state, no matter their race, their faith, their gender, their orientation or identity.

In THIS Washington, nearly 95 percent of the legislation passed every year is bipartisan. People are often surprised when I tell them that, but that's really how it is.

Last biennium, more than a third of bills passed this chamber unanimously.

That is a lot of common ground.

And it's not easy. These bipartisan successes only happen when we are creative and listen to our constituents and to each other.

They happen when we are patient with each other, and impatient about the problems we face.

So as we kick off the 2023 legislative session, I invite all of us to focus on our common ground.

I believe the historic diversity in this chamber strengthens our ability to serve ALL Washingtonians, and it also brings us closer together, inviting us to stretch ourselves as we continue to adapt and advance.

This is the People's House, and we are sent here by our constituents to do the People's Work.

So, let's get to it!