

Speaker Laurie Jinkins  
Opening Day Remarks  
2024 Legislative Session

Thank you, Chair Peters, for welcoming us to the ancestral homeland of the Squaxin Island people.

We are honored to have you joining us for opening day of the 2024 session and celebrate the government-to-government relationship we have with Washington's sovereign tribes.

Thank you, Rabbi Goldstein and Imam Kaddoura for being here today and lifting us all with your shared words of guidance and reflection.

And thank you, Evan, for that glorious rendition of our national anthem.

I also want to recognize the new Minority Leader, as well as the new Deputy Minority Leader.

Drew and Mike, it was great to spend time with each of you in your districts and I look forward to continuing to work with both of you in your new leadership roles.

Before I go into my remarks, I want to recognize the global context of this moment. The world is smaller every day, and things happening on the other side of the world can have just as big of an impact on us as the things that happen in our own communities. I know that I, and many others in this chamber, have felt this deeply over the last few months.

We have seen how anti-Semitism anywhere leads to increased attacks against our Jewish community members and their places of worship. We have seen how the rise in Islamophobia, and the xenophobia closely tied to it, leads to attacks on our Islamic, Muslim, and Sikh community members and their places of worship.

Here, we have worked together to strengthen our hate crime laws and increase security for non-profits, including religious organizations, and we will continue to fight anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, anti-Asian hate, anti-Blackness and the other social ills that put the safety and prosperity of Washingtonians at risk.

Members of the House, people of the great state of Washington –

I stand before you today both optimistic and determined about the next 60 days.

And, on this auspicious day, I mustn't go one moment longer without proclaiming GO DAWGS!

When I was first chosen as Speaker-elect by my caucus, I set out across the state to visit every House member in every district before the 2020 session.

My biggest takeaway from those visits was that we are all committed to making things better for the people we serve.

That shared commitment helped our state fare better than most during a global pandemic, and we should be proud of that.

Last year I again traveled the state to meet with as many of you as possible, and my optimism and determination are a result of the connections made in those visits.

Whether it was a cup of coffee, a meal, a walk, or a tour of a noteworthy location in your districts, some common themes emerged in these visits that underscore how interconnected we are as Washingtonians.

I don't think there's a district in this state where I haven't visited a restaurant, a diner, or a coffee shop of some sort. Many of you chose to meet me in one of these locations over the last few months.

And I saw time and again how deeply rooted you all are in your communities by the informal interactions with constituents while we were out, like with Rep. Klicker and his wife in Walla Walla, and with Rep. Reed in Seattle's Belltown neighborhood.

We keep hearing our state has the strongest economy in the nation; in fact, we were just recently ranked as the #1 economy again by WalletHub. And maybe you've questioned those rankings at some point.

But I can tell you unequivocally: after seeing establishments in every corner of the state bustling with customers, I feel very positive about the strength of our economy.

I'm glad we made record investments in relief for sectors hit hard by the pandemic, like our hospitality-related businesses.

But we know our top ranking doesn't tell the whole story and doesn't speak for everyone in our state.

In my visits with you, I heard over and over the ongoing challenges of housing, homelessness, and the divide between families who can afford to buy multi-million-dollar homes, and those who cannot afford any home at all.

Last year, we took some big bipartisan steps to address the housing shortage in our state.

We passed a middle housing bill, we eased barriers to accessory dwelling units, we put the dream of homeownership within reach of folks who were historically excluded from it, and we made big investments in our Housing Trust Fund to build more affordable housing across our state.

But those aren't the only steps we need to take.

Those victories didn't do anything for the constituent I met at one of my coffee hours this summer.

She is a retired senior citizen, single, living on fixed income, and her rent has gone up 70 percent over the last two years.

**70 PERCENT!**

She doesn't know if she can even afford to stay in her home and isn't sure where she'll go if she can't.

Across Washington, people are facing skyrocketing rents. They are stressed, they are afraid, and they are asking us to help.

We should help them with more predictability and stability. We can't let them down.

Our economy may be strong, but there are also too many families struggling to find child care. And even if they do find it, they often can't afford it.

The child care crisis is bad for both workers and employers in Washington, because even though our economy is creating good-paying jobs, without access to child care too many qualified workers can't fill or keep those jobs.

That's bad news for the workforce shortages we're already grappling with.

Housing and child care are integral to having a strong economy. I know this, you all know this, and that's why we're going to help make sure every Washingtonian has stable, secure housing, and every working parent can access quality, affordable child care.

I hope you're all with me on this.

When I came to your districts, several of you invited me into your homes and shared a meal with me, which was a special treat.

Some of you, like Rep. Wylie, cooked one of the best dinners I've ever had.

Some of you, like Rep. Connors, made me a delicious early morning breakfast.

Some of you, like Rep. McEntire, invited me to your family dinner, where I was served a dish that's now become a staple in my family too.

And some of you, like Rep. Kretz and his wife, served my wife and me the best darn slice of apple cake we've ever had.

By the way, Joel – my wife still raves to this day about the coffee you served us a few years ago. So between that, the apple cake and the beautiful land you live on, you're guaranteed we'll be back again.

Sitting around your family tables, meeting your spouses, having good food and good conversation together, it was clear to me how interconnected we all are.

But right now, across Washington, too many families are missing someone who isn't there because they're struggling with a behavioral health challenge, and they cannot access the treatment they need to get well.

We're all too aware of the toll of the opioid crisis, and how fentanyl is killing Washingtonians, including an alarming increase in fentanyl poisonings and deaths in children.

That's why we are going to expand access to behavioral health by investing in our workforce and expanding community-based care and inpatient treatment in our communities.

I'm excited our UW behavioral health teaching hospital is coming online in June, which will increase available bed capacity, and be a boon to training our behavioral health workforce. Thank you, Rep. Chopp, for making this happen five years ago. It's incredibly gratifying to see it come to fruition.

We're going to address the opioid crisis and prevent toxic drug poisonings by:

By ramping up opioid education and awareness for young people;

By ensuring overdose reversal medications are widely available, and increasing safety and supports for families impacted by the fentanyl crisis;

By expanding treatment, both inpatient services and low barrier access to outpatient services;

And by enhancing access to recovery supports, so people can stay healthy and rebuild their lives.

Tribal communities have been the most severely impacted by fentanyl and its devastation.

No community wants to be at the forefront of this crisis, but Tribes are also leading the way with model programs that remove barriers to treatment, and we would be wise to listen to their voices and learn from their approach. Thank you, Rep. Lekanoff, for bringing us together.

I had a lot of great food in your districts, but I also had some good exercise. These excursions reinforced for me how beautiful and special our state is.

I walked along Puget Sound from the Port of Seattle to the Olympic Sculpture Park with Rep. Berry.

Rep. Callan took me to see Jakob Two Trees, the amazing, 14-foot troll statue along the Rainier Trail near Issaquah.

Reps. Griffey and Couture took me on a tour of a sawmill that is one of the district's major employers, underscoring the importance of healthy forests for both our environment and our economy.

And while it was too far to walk, I saw some of the most gorgeous, remote areas of our state while driving the back roads from Pomeroy to Colfax when going from visiting Rep. Dye to visiting Rep. Schmick.

Seeing the different regions of our state, each with its own distinctive beauty, and finishing the 505 miles of Washington's portion of the Pacific Crest Trail this past year, has made me fall in love with where we live all over again.

I'm so proud of the progress we've made to protect our state from the impacts of climate change, and I'm determined we are not going back on that progress.

We're not going back on rebates for electric heat pumps and weatherization grants.

We're not going back on converting school buses from noisy, dirty diesel to clean electric.

We're not going back on addressing rising asthma rates in our children.

Washingtonians know climate change is real.

They know it is a threat.

They want us to take this threat seriously and act to protect their families, their homes, their communities, their health, their quality of life, and the strong economy we have.

The very air we breathe is at stake if we don't protect our investments in a cleaner, better future for our state.

So, we're going to protect those and keep moving forward on climate.

Speaking of not going backwards, I want to be clear that as long as I'm Speaker of this House, we will protect every person's bodily autonomy.

When the decisions you make for yourself do not impact the health or safety of others, no one but you should be making them.

When the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, I said this state would remain a beacon of light and hope for all impacted by this terrible decision.

That is exactly what we are for patients coming here from states with draconian anti-choice laws, desperately seeking reproductive health care. These are laws that deny care to women, even at the cost of their lives!

Not in Washington state.

Not only will we be here to help you get the reproductive or gender-affirming care you need, we've also made sure other states can't punish you for coming here to seek that legal and necessary care.

This may seem like a lot to tackle for a short session.

But everything is interconnected:

Housing and behavioral health,  
child care and workforce,  
climate and the economy.

Our challenges don't exist in siloes.

And we cannot solve them in siloes.

We only have 60 days, but I'm optimistic and determined.

We talked about our mutual challenges when I visited your districts, and I invite you all to work together with me on solutions.

Let's protect renters from skyrocketing rents.

Let's help working families access child care.

Let's help people access behavioral health care.

Let's prevent fentanyl deaths in our communities.

Let's protect our hard-won investments in clean air and clean energy innovation, and continue to act on climate.

And tell me what won't work in your districts.

I've been to your communities. I know that while we're all interconnected, different regions face unique challenges and sometimes a one-size-fits-all solution won't work.

Let's talk about that.

We're not always going to agree, and that's OK. We just need to keep moving forward because Washingtonians expect progress.

So let's make it happen. Go Dawgs!