

# 38<sup>th</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## June Robinson · Mike Sells · Emily Wicks

### SESSION REPORT

#### Senator June Robinson



##### COMMITTEES

- Ways & Means (Vice Chair, Operating & Revenue)
- Health & Long Term Care
- Labor, Commerce & Tribal Affairs

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- Capital Budget
- College & Workforce Development

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#### Representative Emily Wicks



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- Children, Youth & Families
- Transportation

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Dear neighbors,

Last year, our state was under assault by the COVID-19 virus. Small businesses struggled to stay open while skilled workers were laid off and worried about how they'd pay their rent or mortgage. And the state was staring at an estimated \$9 billion in cuts to vital services such as education and health care.

Things are much different today. During the 2021 session—the first remote session in state history—we made historic progress by focusing on a handful of priorities and guiding principles: **pandemic response and public health, economic recovery, racial justice and equity, and climate change.**

These principles helped us address urgent and emerging needs, which led to landmark reforms and budgets that will help everyone recover and rebuild.

#### A partial list of victories includes:

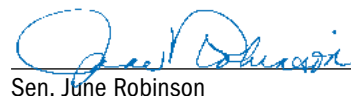
- A state operating budget that invests in public schools, health care, housing, and aid to both workers and small businesses.
- Aid to workers and new laws to help create jobs.
- A package of new laws on police reform to prevent the use of deadly force and rebuild trust.
- A state construction budget that breaks the record for investing in building a better Washington, including a massive new push to expand broadband access.
- Laws to protect the environment, including a low-carbon fuel standard.

In this newsletter, we'll give you a quick summary on some of the most important work we each did this session. There isn't room to write about everything, so if you're curious about a specific issue or bill, please contact our offices and we'll get you answers.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and for giving us the honor of serving as your lawmakers for the 38th District.

  
Rep. Mike Sells

  
Rep. Emily Wicks

  
Sen. June Robinson



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# Sen. June Robinson · 2021 Session Report



In this historic year especially – as our families and businesses look to recover and rebuild after the health and economic impacts of the pandemic – we needed a budget that would meet the moment. As Vice Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, it was an

honor to partner with community members and with colleagues to champion the bold, sustainable investments our state needs. Thanks to your input and collaboration, the legislature passed a **\$59.2 billion operating budget** that keeps the money flowing through our communities so that we can all get back on our feet and build a more resilient Washington together. Highlights of this budget include:

- Investments to stabilize Washington's **K-12 schools** and to help them safely reopen, including grants to assist students with learning loss and new funding for special education.
- Investments in **healthcare** affordability, **behavioral health** services, and foundational **public health**, so that our community members can more easily get and stay healthy, and to make sure we're better prepared for any future public health emergencies.
- Investments in **broadband** access, particularly in underserved and rural communities, to ensure that our neighbors can rely on online resources when getting an education, speaking to healthcare providers, working, and communicating with loved ones.



- Investments in support for **businesses** and **workers** to help business owners and their employees bounce back, particularly for small businesses in industries hit hardest by the economic fallout of the pandemic.
- Investments in supporting affordable **housing** and reducing **homelessness**, including funding for rental assistance, homeowner assistance, and shelter capacity grants.
- Investments in Washington's beautiful **natural resources** and **climate resiliency**, including new funding for firefighting resources and our state park.
- Investments in **human services**, like expanded Paid Family Leave for those forced out of work during the pandemic, Immigrant Relief Fund payments, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Thanks to the additional \$7 billion in one-time federal funds from the **American Rescue Plan**, this budget gets targeted relief to struggling households, strengthens our state's safety net, and builds a stronger and more resilient public

health system.

Other highlights include a landmark expansion of state funding for high-quality childcare and early learning through the Fair Start for Kids Act. In Washington, our childcare crisis costs businesses \$2.08 billion a year and forces working parents to forego \$14 billion a year in lost wages due to lack of childcare access. The **Fair Start for Kids Act (SB 5237)** stabilizes and expands the childcare industry by increasing subsidy rates, makes childcare more affordable by reducing copays for families, broadens access to these supports by expanding eligibility, and strengthens prevention and intervention services. It will be a critical tool for helping our communities recover more quickly by getting parents back to work, get-



ting our economy up and running, and giving kids a fair start in life.

We can make this investment thanks in large part to the state capital gains excise tax (**SB 5096**), a policy I sponsored to reform our upside-down tax code – one that asks the wealthiest among us to invest so much less than low- and middle-income families in the health and strength of our future. Though only about 0.23% of Washington taxpayers will be affected, the capital gains tax will raise about \$500 million a year, money that will fund the Fair Start for Kids Act and ensure working parents have the affordable, high-quality childcare they need to rejoin the workforce and reopen businesses in the wake of COVID-19.

Washington state has the most regressive tax code in the nation. Our lowest-income neighbors pay six times more in taxes, as a share of their income, than the state's highest income households. As a result, working families are funding a disproportionate share of the programs and services that keep us all housed, fed, healthy, working, and safe. Alongside the Working Families Tax Rebate – which will put money directly in the pockets of working Washingtonians – the capital gains excise tax is an important stride forward toward a more equitable, more resilient future. After years of work, years of dialogue, and thousands of voices calling for this policy, I was proud to work with my colleagues to get this passed this session.

## Rep. Mike Sells · 2021 Session Report

### ADDRESSING EMERGENT NEEDS TO KEEP BUSINESSES AFLOAT



In every corner of the state, workers were struggling to put food on the table and businesses were at grave risk of going under. It was clear we had to act quickly. Early in session, Sen. Karen Keiser and I, as chairs of our respective chambers' labor committees, introduced bipartisan identical bills (**SB 5061 / HB 1098**) to help business-

owners who were facing unprecedented UI tax rate hikes (up to 500 percent in some cases) by reducing their tax bills, and increasing unemployment benefits for the state's lowest-wage workers. This was the first bill signed into law, back in February.

But more help was needed for businesses and the people they employ. So, in April, we passed **SB 5478**, which put \$2.2 billion in UI tax cuts back into the pockets of Washington's employers. The new law provides the hardest-hit businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, gyms, bowling alleys, retail outlets, and others, with \$500 million from a state funded unemployment relief account to reduce UI premium taxes in 2022.

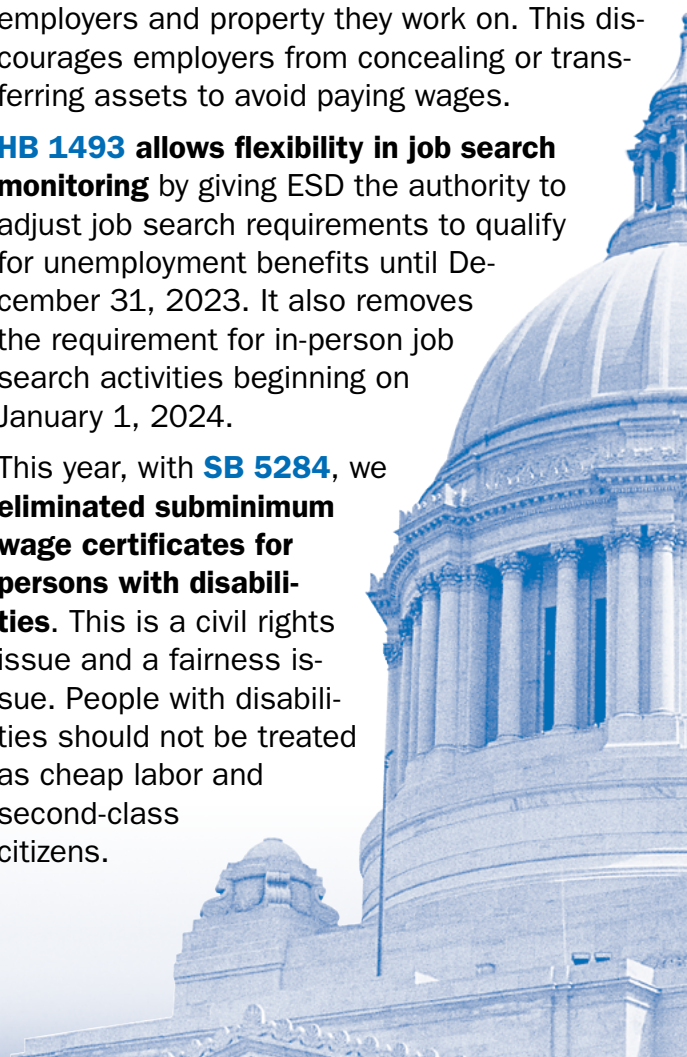
### FOCUSING ON WORKING FAMILIES AND WORKER PROTECTIONS

Among the many victories reached this session, below are some of the measures that put working families first by addressing wage theft, intimidation and retaliation, implementing reforms to our Employment Security Department, and encouraging diversity, fairness, equity, and justice:

- I sponsored **HB 1097** to **strengthen Washington's anti-retaliation protections** for workers who report unsafe workplace conditions. The bill adds penalties for non-compliance and issues grants to help small businesses meet safety standards.



- We expanded access to the **Paid Family and Medical Leave** (PFML) program with **HB 1073** to families who lost eligibility as a result of job losses or furloughs due to COVID-19. To be eligible, employees must have worked at least 820 hours in the last year. This bill allows workers to use their 2019 hours worked to qualify for PFML benefits.
- We also passed **SB 5097**, sponsored by Sen. June Robinson, to **expand coverage of PFML** by including individuals not related by blood into the definition of family. With this change, people will be able to receive PFML benefits while caring for loved ones they consider family. This is particularly important in Black, Indigenous, People of Color, immigrant, and LGBTQ communities.
- While agriculture is a cornerstone of Washington's economy, farmworkers were exempt from overtime pay until a 2020 Supreme Court decision saying that dairy workers were no longer exempt. **SB 5172** extends these rules to provide a **40-hour work week for ALL agricultural workers**. Starting January 1, 2024, any work beyond those hours will be paid as overtime.
- **SB 5193** creates a training program to prepare a reserve force of skilled Unemployment Insurance claims adjudicators so that, when there is high demand, the Employment Security Department has a pool of **trained and qualified adjudicators who can handle and resolve claims** more efficiently.
- **SB 5425** allows for **extended benefits for unemployment insurance past the 52-week** benefit limit. This bill makes the ESD system nimble during this pandemic by removing barriers in state law that prevent workers from getting extended benefits available through COVID-specific federal laws.
- The **Health Emergency Labor Standards Act** (HELSA), **SB 5115**, creates a presumption that frontline employees infected by COVID-19 during the current health emergency **qualify for workers' compensation**. HELSA will establish the strongest occupational disease standards in the nation by creating a real safety net for frontline workers during a statewide health emergency.
- **SB 5190** provides **health care workers with presumptive benefits during a public health emergency**. It guarantees workers' compensation coverage for healthcare professionals who can't work due to contracting or being exposed to COVID-19 or other disease subject to a public health emergency. It also qualifies these workers for unemployment insurance if they're terminated during the emergency or had to leave work to quarantine.
- Everyone wearing the same hard hat and doing the same kind of work should get the same information and training to protect their health and life. We passed **HB 1206** to increase safety requirements on the **placement, training, and oversight of temporary workers** to prevent injuries and save lives.
- Known as the **Washington Recovery Act**, **SB 5355** gives Washington workers, whose employers don't pay their wages, a **new tool to recover their hard-earned money**. It lets workers put a hold, or "lien," on certain property of their employers and property they work on. This discourages employers from concealing or transferring assets to avoid paying wages.
- **HB 1493** allows **flexibility in job search monitoring** by giving ESD the authority to adjust job search requirements to qualify for unemployment benefits until December 31, 2023. It also removes the requirement for in-person job search activities beginning on January 1, 2024.
- This year, with **SB 5284**, we **eliminated subminimum wage certificates for persons with disabilities**. This is a civil rights issue and a fairness issue. People with disabilities should not be treated as cheap labor and second-class citizens.





# Rep. Emily Wicks · 2021 Session Report



## BOOSTING OUR ECONOMY

I'm happy to report that the legislature passed my bill **(HB 1386)** to extend the tax break used to help bring businesses to the Cascade Industrial Center.

That tax break will now apply statewide for industrial or manufacturing facilities of at least 10,000 square feet providing 25 living-wage jobs—with wages of at least \$23 an hour—along with health care benefits.

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS

The House and Senate passed my legislation to support the Special Olympics **(HB 1469)**, which gets funding here in Washington state through a raffle.

Now that the governor signed this bill into law, local organizers of the Special Olympics have more flexibility and certainty about their fundraising each year for events that serve nearly 20,000 athletes.

## BUILDING A BETTER WASHINGTON

This summer, you'll notice far more construction activity.

Part of the reason is our state's new construction budget **(HB 1080)**, which breaks the record with \$6.3 billion in projects.

This budget also includes a huge push to boost broadband access, with \$411 million in funding. The pandemic proved how critical broadband internet is with so many people working from home and sharing the same slow internet connection, often with children trying to learn remotely. Broadband isn't a luxury anymore. It's an essential service much like electricity and running water.

The construction budget also invests \$1.55 billion to early childhood education, public schools, and higher education, as well as \$350 million for affordable housing and emergency shelters, \$724 million for critical public infrastructure, and \$81 million for clean energy projects.

## These are some of the projects here in the 38th District:

- \$10.8 million to continue Ecology's work on the Everett Smelter Plume Cleanup to ensure healthier soil and environmental justice for our neighbors and local families
- Nearly \$8 million to clean up the Kimberly Clark property and a clear commitment for further investment in cleanup efforts at the Port, a major victory for local jobs this year and progress at that site in the future
- \$14 million for Compass Health Broadway
- \$31,000 for Imagine Children's Museum
- \$258,000 for Dawson Place
- \$188,000 for the Edgewater Park Sports Court

## A MORE SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The new \$11.8 billion transportation budget funds major work that was under threat last year because of financial pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic and an initiative that caused Gov. Jay Inslee to put construction projects on hold to save money.

The budget also shifts more funding away from highways and toward mass transit, special needs transit, bicycle/pedestrian projects, Safe Routes to School.

It includes new initiatives to create a more diverse transportation workforce along with funding for a more sustainable transportation system with electrification, charging stations, and hybrid ferries.

The budget **(SB 5165)** passed the House 90-6 and the Senate 41-9.



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LD38

## Sen. June Robinson · Rep. Mike Sells · Rep. Emily Wicks

### IN THE 38TH DISTRICT, LOCAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING INCLUDES:

- \$2.492 million for the 41st Street-Rucker Avenue Freight Corridor Phase 2
- \$63,000 for Phase 3 of the Centennial Trail Connector
- \$49.919 million for corridor and interchange improvements from I-5 at State Route 529
- \$6.664 million for 116th Street NE, 88th Street NE, and State Route 528/Marine Drive interchange with I-5
- \$12.443 million in State Route 526 corridor improvements
- \$5 million to Community Transit for SWIFT Bus Rapid Transit Green Line
- \$2.103 million to Community Transit and Everett Transit for SWIFT II Bus Rapid Transit
- \$1.28 million to Everett Transit for electric vehicle charging infrastructure

