



KEITH WAGONER

Washington State Senator - Republican Whip

39th Legislative District - Serving Parts of Skagit and Snohomish Counties.

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW 39TH DISTRICT

Stay in touch!

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As the dust settles on the 2026 legislative session, I'm writing to update you on the actions taken in Olympia this year and their growing impact here at home.

While I always approach my work with optimism, I must be candid: this was a difficult session for fiscal responsibility and constitutional rights. The majority party passed a supplemental operating budget that relies on unsustainable spending, raiding billions from dedicated funds (including law enforcement and firefighter pensions), and taking more from taxpayers to fund an ever-expanding bureaucracy.

Most concerning is the new state income tax. This policy is a direct violation of our state constitution and has been repeatedly rejected by Washington voters.

We also witnessed a troubling trend of the majority party undermining the voice of the people.

Despite these setbacks, I am proud that by working across the aisle, we secured major wins for our district. I fought to ensure our local priorities were funded in the capital and transportation budgets. Additionally, three of my prime-sponsored bills successfully crossed the finish line—measures that will help unclog our legal system and bolster our state's emergency response.

You can find more details on these issues throughout this newsletter. My door is always open; please reach out if you have questions about the session or any of the information included here.

It remains a distinct honor to serve as your voice for Skagit County and the 39th District in the Senate.

Sincerely,

Sen. Keith Wagoner
39th Legislative District

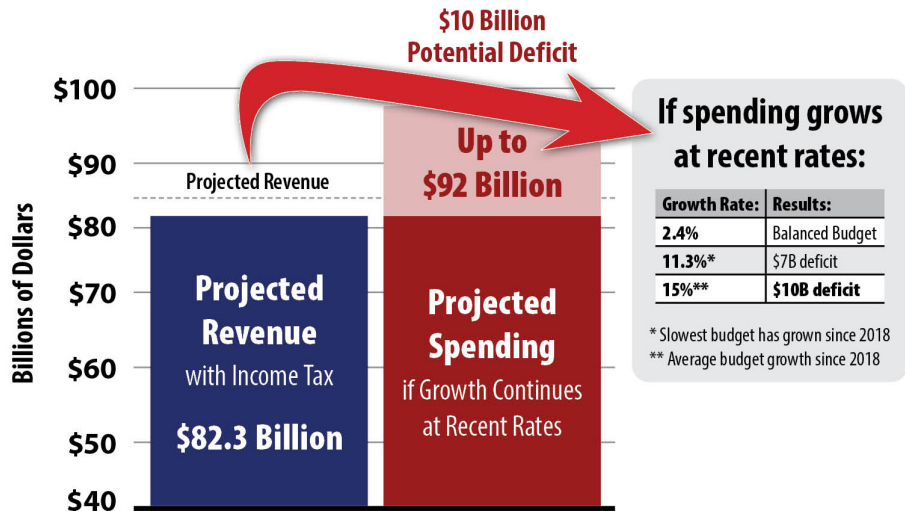


THE 2026 SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING BUDGET: A HOUSE OF CARDS

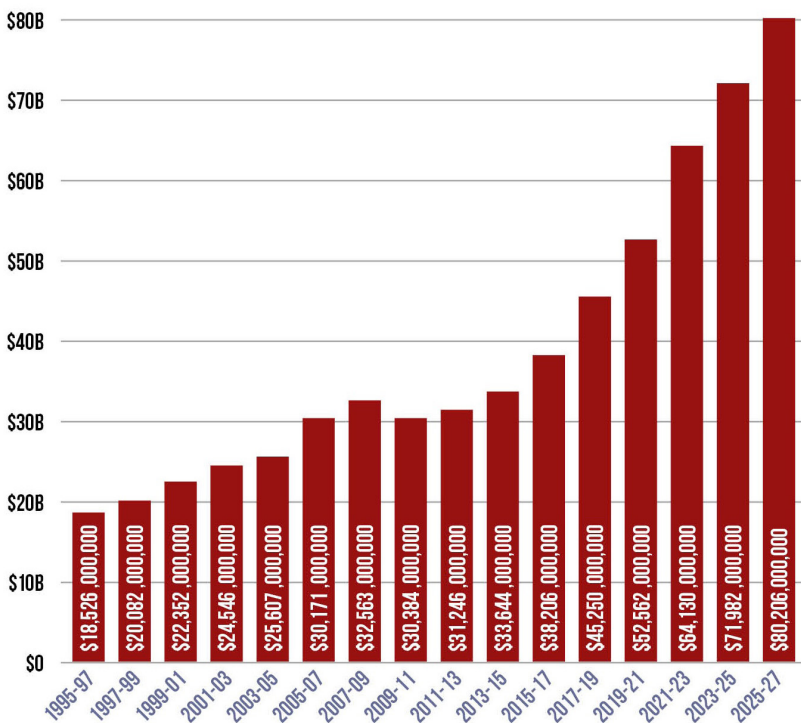
I call the supplemental operating budget passed this year a “House of Cards” because it relies on a foundation that is unsustainable. To fund permanent government growth, the plan raids one-time funds, pulling nearly \$4 billion from one-time balances to pay for ongoing commitments. Long term, the budget also relies on an unconstitutional and volatile new income tax that is likely to be overturned by the courts or avoided by residents moving out of state. Support for this income tax was built through bait-and-switch tactics, like promises to local government and schools that were not included in the final bill. Most funds will be dumped into the notoriously mismanaged general fund.

\$10 Billion Deficit Next Biennium Even With an Income Tax?

Based on projected revenues and spending growth trends



State spending doubles in a decade
30-year operating budget history



Most problematic of all, this budget fails to address the real crisis. Washington does not have a revenue problem; Democrats have a spending problem. While our constitution defines K-12 education as the Legislature’s “paramount duty,” its share of the budget continues to shrink. This isn’t due to a lack of funds, but because the majority has made the total spending “pie” so bloated with non-essential programs that core priorities like education, healthcare, and public safety are being crowded out.

By staying this course, the state risks falling into a \$10 billion budget hole that your family will ultimately be asked to fill.

Senator

KEITH WAGONER

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW

DEMOCRATS PASS UNCONSTITUTIONAL NEW INCOME TAX

Perhaps the most troubling development this session was the passage of **Senate Bill 6346**. While the majority party has spent months branding this as a “millionaire tax,” the reality is far more concerning. Introduced on day 23 of the session, this 9.9% income tax applies to everyone, but for the moment includes a deduction for those earning less than \$1 million.

Don't be fooled by the branding. During the floor debate, Republicans offered an amendment to legally lock in that million-dollar threshold so it could never be lowered without a vote of the people. The majority rejected it. In fact, one House Democrat cautioned colleagues not to trust anyone who says this tax won't eventually expand to everyone. History shows that once an income tax is established, the “exemption” never stays high; it is only a matter of time before they come for middle-income taxpayers as well.

Voters have rejected an income tax at the ballot box 10 separate times over the last 90 years—most recently in 2010, when 64% of Washingtonians said “no.” This year, the people made their voices heard again: more than 118,000 citizens signed in against **SB 6346**, making it the most unpopular bill ever introduced in our state's history.

Beyond being unpopular, this tax is a direct assault on our state constitution. For nearly a century, starting with the landmark *Culliton v. Chase* (1933) decision, the Washington Supreme Court has ruled that income is property. Under Article VII, any tax on property must be uniform and cannot exceed 1%.

By passing a graduated 9.9% tax, the majority is willfully ignoring a century of precedent. Instead of fixing our tax system by lowering the sales tax, they are piling a new, illegal burden on top of it and hoping that judicial activism will override our state's constitution.

Washington's constitution is clear, and the courts have been equally clear for nearly a century — income is property, and progressive income taxes are unconstitutional under existing law. If the State proceeds with the new income tax, it will create a direct conflict with binding precedent and the constitutional protections that safeguard taxpayers. We are preparing to challenge the tax in court.

FMR WA ATTORNEY GENERAL
ROB MCKENNA

Strengthening Our Transportation Network

The 2026 supplemental transportation budget (**ESSB 6005**) emphasizes the “basics” of government. Rather than starting new, flashy projects, we focused on fixing what we already have.

Bridge & Road Preservation: We secured a significant portion of the statewide \$1.37 billion increase for preservation and flood recovery. For the 39th, this means accelerated maintenance on high-risk corridors where winter weather and heavy usage have taken a toll.

State Route 9 Improvements: Funding remains on track for the widening and bridge construction from Marsh Road to 2nd Street. In this budget, we successfully defended the timeline for these critical safety improvements to ensure the project continues without further delays.

Local Flood Recovery: The supplemental budget includes \$45 million for a temporary loan program specifically for local highway flood recovery. This is a lifeline for our smaller towns and Skagit/Snohomish counties when they need to repair infrastructure quickly after a storm.

Ferry System Stability: For those who travel west and use the state's “marine highways,” the budget provides \$29 million to accelerate the construction of three new hybrid-electric vessels. This is about reliability; we need boats in the water to keep our region moving.

UNDERMINING THE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

One of the most disappointing aspects of the 2026 session was the majority party's persistent efforts to undermine our state's democratic traditions. In Washington, the initiative process is the "first power" reserved by the people to keep the Legislature in check. Unfortunately, this year, that power was treated as an inconvenience rather than a constitutional mandate.

Silencing Citizen Initiatives

Prior to the session, hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians signed initiatives to the Legislature regarding critical issues like the Parents' Bill of Rights and protecting fairness in girls' sports. Despite our state constitution requiring that these measures "take precedence over all other measures," the majority party refused to even hold public hearings on them. By blocking these initiatives from a fair hearing, they effectively silenced over 400,000 citizens who asked for their voices to be heard in Olympia .

**Attacking Local Control and Your Right to Choose Your Sheriff**

We also witnessed an assault on the right of local communities to govern themselves. The majority pushed through **Senate Bill 5974**, a controversial measure that basically gives a state board—appointed by the governor—the power to remove a locally elected sheriff.

In 38 of our 39 counties, the sheriff is an elected official who answers directly to the voters, not to politicians in Olympia. This new law effectively allows unelected bureaucrats to override the will of the people and strip power from local voters. Sheriffs should be accountable to the communities they serve, not a political commission many miles away.

Burdens on the Democratic Process

Finally, there were repeated attempts to add unreasonable burdens to the initiative process itself. These efforts, if successful, would have made it harder and more expensive for everyday citizens to bring concerns to the ballot. Whether through restrictive signature-gathering rules or procedural hurdles, the end result would have been clear: the "voice of the people" would have only been heard when it aligns with the majority's agenda.

I am happy to report that we were able to defeat the "Initiative Killer" bill, but it will require continued vigilance to protect our constitutional rights. I will work to ensure that the power in Washington remains where it belongs—with you.



DELIVERING RESULTS FOR THE 39TH DISTRICT AND WASHINGTON



By working across the aisle and staying persistent, I am proud to report that three of my prime-sponsored bills were signed by the governor. These measures directly address public safety, judicial delays, and emergency response.

Our legal system has been facing a significant caseload crisis, and one of the primary bottlenecks to a “speedy trial” is a shortage of judges. I successfully passed **Senate Bill 5868**, which authorizes an additional Superior Court judge for Skagit County. This was a hard-fought victory, as the bill had failed in previous years; now it will finally provide the judicial capacity needed to unclog our local legal system and ensure justice is served in a timely manner for the citizens of our district.

Public safety is compromised when cases are delayed or dismissed because of a “hopelessly overloaded” state toxicology lab. To address this crisis, I introduced **Senate Bill 5880**. This new law allows certified private labs to help process backlogged samples, reducing the thousands of pending cases that have stalled the justice system. While I believe the state must eventually invest more in our own State Patrol labs, we cannot allow a testing backlog to stand in the way of fair trials and community safety today.

Having served 23 years in the U.S. military, I know the importance of a clear chain of command during a crisis. **Senate Bill 6046** formally establishes the Washington Division of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) as an official branch within the state Military Department. This transitions the CAP from an informal partner to a formal state asset, allowing for more rapid deployment of volunteer pilots and ground crews during search-and-rescue missions, wildfires, and floods. This new law also supports the CAP’s incredible youth cadet programs, which train Washington’s next generation of leaders.

INVESTING IN LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to these legislative wins, I fought to ensure our community received its fair share in the 2026 supplemental capital and transportation budgets.

We secured critical funding for local road maintenance and continued progress on fish-passage projects, such as those at Lorenzan Creek, which are vital for our local ecosystem and infrastructure.

We also successfully protected funding for Skagit County irrigation infrastructure and community improvement projects that support our local economy and agricultural heritage.

The 2026 supplemental capital budget (**SSB 6003**) is where we see direct investment in the “bricks and mortar” of our district.

- **Skagit County Stabilization Center:** I am particularly proud to have secured additional funding for the Skagit County Stabilization Center. This facility is a cornerstone of our regional response to the behavioral health and addiction crisis.
- **Small District Modernization:** Several of our local school districts are eligible for the Small District and STEC Schools Modernization grants. This session, we boosted this program to help rural schools replace aging HVAC systems and make seismic safety upgrades without overtaxing local homeowners.
- **Salmon Recovery & Floodplains:** We authorized \$37 million for Floodplains by Design and \$11 million for the Salmon Recovery Funding Board. These grants are vital for the 39th, allowing us to manage flood risks while protecting the natural heritage of the Skagit and Stillaguamish rivers.

Securing landslide recovery funds for Concrete

I am particularly pleased that the updated capital budget includes a vital \$464,000 allocation for the Burpee Hill Road landslide recovery project.

For too long, the families and businesses in and around Concrete have been at the mercy of the unstable slopes on Burpee Hill. It’s a public-safety crisis that endangers our citizens and threatens our transportation access.

By working closely with my colleagues on the Senate Ways & Means Committee, we successfully secured this funding to help Skagit County Public Works implement long-term stabilization and repair.



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