

2024 Session Review

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King bills signed into law

I am pleased that seven bills I proposed this session have now been signed into law:

- **SSB 5919:** Allows public utility districts to sell biogenic carbon dioxide.
- **ESB 5997:** Adjusts plumbing trainee hours reporting.
- **ESB 6087:** Increases funding for the fire service training account.
- **SSB 6089:** Improves electrical inspector requirements and pathways.
- **SSB 6108:** Modifies prompt payment rules for retainage in construction contracts.
- **SSB 6115:** Establishes speed safety camera policies.
- **SSB 6192:** Modifies prompt payment rules for change orders in construction contracts.



Senator King was on hand when Governor Inslee signed SSB 6192 on March 19.



Senator
CURTIS KING
Serving Washington's 14th Legislative District

2024 Session Review

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This year's 60-day "short" legislative session ended on March 7. During session, the Legislature passed supplemental versions of the state operating, capital and transportation budgets. They make adjustments to the original two-year budgets approved by the Legislature last year.

Besides passing these budgets, we also passed three voter initiatives (out of six sent to the Legislature by the voters), regarding police pursuits, state incomes taxes and parental rights. Read inside for more information about the budgets and initiatives.

It continues to be a great honor and privilege to serve as your 14th Legislative District State Senator. If you have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. You may contact my office by phone, email or postal mail.

Sincerely,

Senator Curtis King
14th Legislative District

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▶ **SENATE COMMITTEES:**

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Initiatives sent to Legislature by voters

A big story during this year's session was the Legislature's response to the six initiatives sent to us in early January by voters. As a Legislature, we are dictated to hold hearings on all initiatives from the people. Finally, just before the end of session, Democratic legislative leaders scheduled joint House-Senate public hearings on three of the initiatives. During the final week of the session, the Legislature passed these initiatives. I voted for all three measures, which go into effect June 6. They are:

- **Initiative 2113** will restore the ability of Washington police officers to engage in vehicular pursuits of suspects. We expect it will help reverse the rise in crime in Washington.
- **I-2081** will give parents the right to review K-12 instructional materials and require parental notification of school-provided medical services.
- **I-2111** will ban any state or local income tax in Washington.

The other three initiatives sent to the Legislature this year were ignored. Majority Democrats refused to hold public hearings on them or allow legislators to vote on them, so these measures will appear on the statewide ballot this November. They are:

- **I-2109**, which would repeal the state capital-gains income tax that was approved by the Democrat-led Legislature in 2021.
- **I-2117**, to repeal the state's costly climate policy that was enacted by majority Democrats in 2021 and took full effect early last year.
- **I-2124**, which would allow individuals to opt out of the mandatory payroll tax for the state-run long-term care program called "WA Cares."



Local projects funded in supplemental capital budget

The 2024 supplemental state capital budget includes major funding increases in K-12 school construction, behavioral-health facilities, affordable housing, water infrastructure, parks and more.

Rep. Chris Corry, Rep. Gina Mosbrucker and I are pleased with the capital investments the Legislature funded in our district. I am proud of our collaborative work to advocate for our local needs:

- Bringing It Home II 24-Hour Domestic Violence Shelter - \$8.72 million
- Perry Technical Institute Electrical Program - \$5 million
- West Klickitat Assisted Living Facility - \$3 million
- Triumph Mental Health Treatment Center - \$2.5 million
- Wishram School District Portable Buildings - \$975,000
- Yakama Nation Detox Center - \$900,000
- Yakima Drop-In Center - \$800,000
- Kittitas Valley Hospital Hydrogen Storage System - \$300,000
- Yakima Valley Crime Lab Facility - \$200,000
- Swan Graphics Equipment and Furnishings - \$108,000
- Filipino American Community of Yakima Valley Building - \$103,000
- Mountain View Grange Improvements - \$100,000
- Columbia Grange #87 Improvements - \$25,000
- School Modernization Grants for Glenwood School District (\$35,000), Roosevelt School District (\$35,000) and Goldendale School District (\$32,000)

Supplemental transportation budget



As ranking Republican on the Senate Transportation Committee, I was involved in developing the supplemental transportation budget, and am pleased the budget was approved unanimously by the Senate and House. The transportation budget provides \$100 million for maintenance and preservation of our state's roads and highways. Another \$31 million is for public safety, including additional Washington State Patrol cadet classes, DUI enforcement grants, wrong-way driver prevention and more.

Several projects in the 14th District were added or funding was continued in the supplemental budget. The most significant project is the Columbia River Bridge replacement between **White Salmon** and **Hood River**. Other projects include a new underpass for State Route 14 in **Bingen**, pedestrian and bicycle paths in **West Yakima** and **White Salmon**, repair of the State Route 241 Bridge in **Mabton**, and Interstate 82 economic development improvements between **Yakima** and **Union Gap**.



During this year's session, Senator King spoke at a Capitol rally on farmworker issues.

Agricultural-overtime bill dies in Senate

One of the most important legislative issues in the Yakima Valley is overtime for agricultural workers.

In 2021, the Legislature passed a bill that phased in overtime for all of agriculture (55 hours in 2022, 48 hours in 2023 and 40 hours beginning in 2024). Agricultural associations in Washington have been concerned that the law overlooks the seasonality and variable nature of agriculture work.

Three years later we are seeing that our farms can't afford to pay overtime to farmworkers. This year will be even worse than the last, as workers are limited to 40 hours, even though they want to work longer. Farms are also increasingly using automated farming machinery, which causes even fewer hours and jobs available for farmworkers.

We are one of the few states that doesn't allow for a seasonality exemption. An exemption is a reasonable solution, wanted by both farms and farmworkers. I met with 300 farmworkers on the Capitol steps in Olympia in late January to rally against the law. They argued it has resulted in a significant loss of take-home pay and reduced hours. Many of those raising their voices work at Latino-owned farms, which have been among the hardest hit by the ag-overtime laws as they try to remain open and keep workers employed.

Last year, I introduced **Senate Bill 5476** as a solution. It would protect farmworker jobs, put more money into farmworker pockets, and help keep our Washington state farms intact. The bill would authorize agricultural employers to select 12 weeks in a calendar a year to employ workers for up to 50 hours in a workweek before overtime applies. After 50 hours of work is performed, overtime pay would apply.

Unfortunately, **SB 5476** did not even advance out of committee in both the 2023 and 2024 sessions.



Will new law lead to natural-gas ban in Washington?

One of the most controversial bills passed by the Legislature this year is **House Bill 1589**, which

was approved without any "yes" votes from Republicans. The bill allows Puget Sound Energy, the state's largest gas-and-electric utility, to stop providing natural gas to its thousands of customers in its service territory starting in 2027. Governor Inslee signed the bill into law on March 28.

Puget Sound Energy's 900,000 gas customers will be responsible for replacing gas furnaces, water heaters, stoves and commercial and industrial equipment. PSE will face a cost of \$7 billion to \$10 billion converting to electricity. With this bill, these costs can now be passed on to their customers. The average cost is expected to be over \$40,000 per home.

Homeowners living outside PSE's service territory (which reaches into Kittitas and Lewis counties, which border Yakima County) should still be concerned about this bill. It would not be a surprise if majority Democrats eventually try to ban natural gas throughout our entire state. Eliminating a relatively cheap and reliable source of energy, leaving citizens to foot the bill, should concern us all, especially since the increased demand for electricity will make our electric less and less reliable.



Bill that could have closed rural hospitals dies at end of session

Another controversial bill that was passed by the Senate this year was **Senate Bill 5241**, which could have led to hospital

closures and put lives in rural communities at risk. I voted no. The proposal would have required the state attorney general, a partisan official who may not understand health care, to approve hospital mergers and acquisitions. If **SB 5241** had become law a few years ago, the hospital in Toppenish would not have been able to survive due to the regulations and paperwork. Fortunately, the House of Representatives did not pass this bill, so it did not advance this session.