

State Representative Paul Harris



Protecting the health of our young people

As the assistant ranking member on the House Health Care and Wellness Committee, I concentrate a lot of my efforts on health care issues. On the final day of the special session this year, I was very pleased we passed a bill that will help keep e-cigarettes and vapor products out of the hands of our young people. While I wanted more safety measures in place and information regarding what ingredients are inside these vapors, this legislation is a good start.

Senate Bill 6328 is a common-sense measure that puts restrictions on the sale and distribution of vapor products. It requires childproof containers for liquid nicotine containers, prohibits sales to minors, and bans vaping in parks, on school grounds, and around child care facilities. Many do not realize how unregulated this industry has been and the danger these products pose to our children.

Improving our health care system

This session, we strengthened our mental health system by improving access to and delivery of critical services. We also passed legislation to expand telemedicine and family medical residency opportunities in high-demand areas.

However, conversations on health care now revolve around costs as they continue to escalate. The Affordable Care Act is not reducing costs and providing the options many expected. While the federal government is mainly responsible, the spiraling costs will have an impact on our operating budget and we will need to explore all options to help control them.

Health care costs limit patient access to care. We can drive down costs by reducing government mandates on health insurance and providing patients more options.



Preserving low-cost, clean energy

During the last biennium, I worked with our local Clark County Public Utility District (PUD) to oppose proposals from the Governor's office to implement a carbon tax and increase clean air standards higher than the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires. This would have negatively impacted the Clark County PUD natural gas plant and, under the Governor's proposal, be considered "dirty" energy.

Let me be clear: Our natural gas plant is one of the cleanest burning, most efficient natural gas plants in the country. It is the specific kind of plant recommended by the EPA's Clean Power Act to replace dirtier coal and oil plants. But our Governor wants to make it prohibitively more expensive by taxing our power and increasing the cost of electricity for Clark County residents.

I will continue to advocate for smart energy policies, utilize our own home-grown hydroelectricity and natural gas, and oppose pet-project policies that would increase energy costs.



Representatives
**Paul Harris &
Lynda Wilson**
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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2016 SESSION REVIEW

State Representatives Paul Harris & Lynda Wilson

17th Legislative District

Representative Paul Harris R-Uancouver

OFFICE:

403 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7976

EMAIL:

Paul.Harris@leg.wa.gov

WEBSITE:

RepresentativePaulHarris.com

COMMITTEES:

- Health Care and Wellness (*Assistant Ranking Member*)
- Appropriations
- Education



Representative Lynda Wilson R-Uancouver

OFFICE:

418 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7994

EMAIL:

Lynda.Wilson@leg.wa.gov

WEBSITE:

RepresentativeLyndaWilson.com

COMMITTEES:

- Community Development, Housing and Tribal Affairs (*Ranking Member*)
- Public Safety
- Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee



Dear Friends and Neighbors:

We hope this letter finds you well and that you are looking forward to the summer months ahead.

State lawmakers completed their work on March 29 and will not return to Olympia until January 2017. We are happy to tell you there were several legislative successes the last two years, including investing more in our K-12 schools and early learning, providing teachers with raises, saving public charter schools, lowering college tuition, improving mental health services, supporting state parks, and balancing the operating budget without major tax increases. We discuss some of these successes in this newsletter.

However, there were also some disappointments. For example, we do not believe the transportation package last year and supplemental operating budget this year were good for the 17th District. We also believe the Legislature and Governor can and must do more to grow our economy and create jobs.

While the legislative sessions are over, please remember we are your full-time State Representatives. Our work on your behalf continues throughout the year. To be your voice in Olympia, we need to hear your voice. Please feel free to call, email, or write us any time. We are also available to meet with you locally in person.

It is an honor to represent the people and communities of the 17th District. It is our privilege to bring your ideas, aspirations, and concerns to the legislative process. We thank you for allowing us to serve you.

Yours in service,

Paul Harris *Lynda Wilson*

Rep. Paul Harris
Minority Whip

Rep. Lynda Wilson
Assistant Minority Whip

State Representatives Paul Harris & Lynda Wilson

2016 SESSION REVIEW



Please join us for a telephone town hall meeting

On the evening of Tuesday, June 28, we will be hosting a telephone town hall meeting. The event, which is like a call-in radio show, will begin at 6:00 p.m. and last an hour. This is an opportunity for us to hear from you and answer your questions. We will also provide our thoughts on legislative issues. All you have to do is call **(360) 588-5068** that evening. We hope you can join us!



TOLL-FREE HOTLINE:
1-800-562-6000

17th Legislative District

Making historic investments in education | 2015–17 operating budget

Our state has three primary budgets: the operating, capital, and transportation budgets. These budgets are on two-year cycles, with the current one ending June 30, 2017.

The operating budget is the largest state budget. It funds our K-12 public schools, institutions of higher education, social services, mental health system, prisons, and other areas of state government.

The Legislature had trouble finalizing the 2015-17 operating budget last year and it resulted in three special sessions. When the final version did finally pass, it was something we were proud to vote “yes” on. Here are some highlights:

- Invested \$1.3 billion more in K-12 education, including expanding access to full-day kindergarten, lowering K-3 class sizes, and providing raises for teachers;
- Reduced tuition at public four-year colleges and universities, and community and technical colleges;
- Made new investments in early learning;
- Improved mental health services;
- Increased funding for state parks;
- Did not rely on major tax increases; and
- Satisfied the four-year balanced budget requirement.

Analyzing the supplemental operating budget

In even-numbered years, such as 2016, state lawmakers make midcourse adjustments to the operating budget. These changes are supposed to be minor, including adjusting for unanticipated caseload changes, correcting technical errors, and paying for emergencies.

The House Democrats had a different approach in mind, including new tax increases, not accounting for K-3 class-size reductions, tapping the rainy-day fund for non-emergencies, and abandoning the four-year balanced budget requirement. Fortunately, they finally relented on these unrealistic demands during the special session.

The final supplemental operating budget passed by the Legislature did not raise taxes, kept K-3 class size reduction promises, only used the rainy-day fund to pay for last summer’s devastating wildfires, and balanced over four years. It also included new investments to address our teacher shortage, mental health system, and the Washington State Patrol.

However, we voted “no” on the supplemental operating budget for three reasons. First, it relies too heavily on fund sweeps from 12 dedicated accounts. Secondly, we are worried about the budget’s impact on Clark County’s integrated health services system. It has an extremely low funding level for non-Medicaid and crisis mental health care reserves. As one of only two counties that are early adopters of this program, Clark County is at a critical point in its development. We will be keeping a keen eye on this as the program develops. Lastly, it leaves a mere \$9 million in the ending fund balance.



Stopping major tax increases

There has been a strong push by Democrats in the Legislature to pass major tax increases. One of these proposals is a new capital gains tax, which many believe is the first step toward a state income tax. Other ideas include raising the business and occupation tax on certain employers, and taxing carbon emissions. Supporters of these proposals seek to expand state spending well beyond current tax collections.

We continue to oppose these ideas. Our state should live within its means. This is no different than what many families do every month. We think you already give the state enough of your hard-earned money.

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Growing the economy – more and better jobs

The best way to increase tax collections is for our state to grow its economy. Preserving and creating jobs, improving our business climate, and strengthening communities have been our legislative priorities since the day we entered office. Our bill sponsorships and voting records reflect these priorities.

It is also critical we protect the few economic advantages of our state – including low-cost, clean energy. We should not be threatening employers with new rules, regulations, and taxes – something the Governor is considering through executive action. We cannot afford to hinder business growth and lose any more employers to other states that advertise fewer rules and regulations.

Respecting the will of the voters on tax increases

Six times since 1993, the voters of our state have said they want a higher voting threshold in the Legislature to raise taxes. Unfortunately, the courts have once again prevented the will of the voters from prevailing.

There is a solution and we support it. **House Joint Resolution 4215** would change our state constitution to include a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to raise taxes. This constitutional change would not only require a majority of state lawmakers voting for it – it would require a majority of voters voting for it in an election. Unfortunately, the resolution was not allowed a vote on the House floor.

The resolution, if enacted, would not end the possibility of all future tax increases. Rather, it would require any such proposals to have broad legislative support in order to pass. Making it harder to raise taxes is a good thing.

Voting “no” on the transportation package

Our state passed a 5-cent state gas tax increase in 2003, and a 9.5-cent state gas tax increase in 2005, to help fund transportation packages. A lot of this money went to Washington State Ferries and megaprojects in King County, including the new State Route 520 Bridge and Seattle Tunnel Project. Both megaprojects are behind schedule, over budget, and plagued with problems.

When a new transportation package emerged last year, this time proposing to increase the state gas tax by 11.9 cents, we voted “no.”

First, we knew many people could not afford to pay more at the pump. Secondly, we did not have confidence in WSDOT to deliver projects effectively and efficiently. The reform bills that passed did not go far enough to ensure transportation project costs would be reduced and WSDOT would be held accountable. Finally, it was simply not a good deal for the people we represent in Clark County. Our region deserves better.

Saving public charter schools

The state Supreme Court ruled our voter-approved public charter schools unconstitutional last September due to their funding mechanism. Fortunately, a bipartisan solution was found this year.

Senate Bill 6194 passed on the last day of the regular session. The legislation directs funding for public charter schools to come from our state’s Opportunity Pathways Account, which contains Washington Lottery revenue not restricted to common schools.

We believe public charter schools can address the unique learning needs of certain students and act as incubators for innovation. These public schools should be allowed to expand over time, but they must be held accountable. This is something we will be watching closely in the years ahead.

In a unique maneuver not utilized since the early 1980s, the Governor did not actually sign **Senate Bill 6194** into law. By not signing or vetoing the legislation, it automatically became law. We are disappointed the Governor did not have the courage to sign this bipartisan, historic bill. His indifference sends the wrong message to students, parents, teachers, and advocates of these voter-approved public schools.

State Representative Lynda Wilson



Holding state agencies accountable

I was recently appointed to the bipartisan Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee (JARRC). This committee works to ensure administrative rules written by state agencies are following the intent of the laws passed by the Legislature. These rules have the force of law. Many state agencies have significantly overstepped their bounds with these rules and regulations.

I sponsored a measure, **House Bill 2554**, which would have *required* JARRC to review a rule or agency action under certain circumstances. It would have been a very good tool for our counties, cities, and the Legislature itself to foster more and better oversight of these agencies. The bill had significant support from local governments and the building industry. It received a public hearing, but did not advance out of committee.

State agencies must understand how their rules and actions affect employers, local governments, and taxpayers. We need systems in place to ensure state government is working for us, not against us.

Protecting those who protect us

After the deadly July 2015 attack on a military recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tennessee – the fourth in the nation since 2008 – I penned a letter to the Governor asking him to find a way to allow our military recruiting centers to protect themselves against these attacks. Thirty-four other state lawmakers joined me in signing the letter. Sadly, there was no response from the Governor.

In January 2016, as a result of my letter, the Adjutant General of the Washington National Guard came to my office to share information about the FBI’s investigation into serious and credible threats to Washington state recruiting centers. He and the Governor were deeply concerned for the safety of our in-state military personnel. The Adjutant General was adamant something be done to protect them and sought my support for funding for soft body armor, ballistic barrier panels, and security guards for these stations. I proposed a budget proviso for this critical funding. It passed out of the House by a strong, bipartisan vote of 91-6.

Disappointingly, my proviso was not included in the final supplemental operating budget. I will continue to work with the Washington National Guard this interim to find a solution to this situation.



Supporting the victims of domestic violence

Sadly, too many families in our communities are forced to endure domestic violence. There were nearly 50,000 reports of domestic violence incidents in 2014 – 70 percent of those against women. We must end this violence and help those who find themselves in, or recovering from, these terrible situations.

I sponsored legislation, **House Bill 2713**, called the Women Helping Women Act. It would have directed the sales and use tax collected on feminine hygiene products to establish a grant program that would support services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault, and to strengthen law enforcement and prosecution strategies to reduce violent crimes against women.

Unfortunately, the bill did not move forward. I will continue to advocate for these and other concepts and work with stakeholder groups who support the victims of domestic violence to reduce this all-too-common societal issue.

