



SENATOR
Ann Rivers



REPRESENTATIVE
Greg Cheney



REPRESENTATIVE
Stephanie McClintock



18th District Legislative Report

Hello Friends and Neighbors!

The 2024 legislative session is just around the corner. It will begin Jan. 8 and end 60 days later, on March 7. We're reaching out now to ask for your opinions about the issues we expect to address during this "short" session – and we always welcome ideas for legislation!

We hope this report finds you and your loved ones well. Please scan the QR code to be connected to an online survey that will convey your priorities to us; also see the invitation to our town-hall meetings Jan. 6. If you have more to share, please call, send an email or write a letter, using the contact information and website addresses on this page.

Thanks for allowing us to serve you.

Sen. Ann Rivers
Ann.Rivers@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7634

Rep. Greg Cheney
Greg.Cheney@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7812

Rep. Stephanie McClintock
Stephanie.McClintock@leg.wa.gov
(360) 786-7850

SENATOR
Ann Rivers

REPRESENTATIVE
Greg Cheney
Assistant Whip

REPRESENTATIVE
Stephanie McClintock

CAPITOL OFFICE

214 Legislative Modular Building (LMB)
P.O. Box 40418
Olympia, WA 98504-0418
(360) 786-7634
Ann.Rivers@leg.wa.gov
SenatorAnnRivers.com

COMMITTEES:

- Health & Long Term Care
(*Republican Leader*)
- Ways & Means
(*Assistant Republican Leader*)
- Capital Budget
- Housing
- Rules

CAPITOL OFFICE

406 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box. 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7812
Greg.Cheney@leg.wa.gov
RepresentativeGregCheney.com

COMMITTEES:

- State Government & Tribal Relations
(*Ranking Member*)
- Capital Budget
- Civil Rights & Judiciary
- Regulated Substances & Gaming

CAPITOL OFFICE

466 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7850
Stephanie.McClintock@leg.wa.gov
RepresentativeStephanieMcClintock.com

COMMITTEES:

- Capital Budget
(*Assistant Ranking Member*)
- Consumer Protection & Business
(*Assistant Ranking Member*)
- Education

2024 SESSION PREVIEW

Time to address cause of high gas prices



This past summer our state overtook California for the worst (meaning highest) gas prices in the nation – and that was before the cost hit \$5 per gallon! Because the 2023 legislative session had been over for nearly two months, there was nothing we could do about it, even though the cause clearly is the state’s cap-and-trade law.

We all understand the concern about excessive carbon, and time will tell whether the cap-and-trade law (official name: the Climate Commitment Act) ever delivers any measurable improvement in Washington’s air quality. What’s frustrating today is how the supporters, before creating the law in 2021, basically denied it would significantly increase the price of energy, specifically gasoline. Only now are some acknowledging a connection.

Washington’s law allows state government to sell “carbon allowances” at auction. Cap-and-trade refers to how each allowance equals one metric ton of carbon emissions (the “cap”), and the allowances may be sold after they’re purchased from the state (the “trade”). It’s a complicated system that is also not as transparent as it should be, especially considering the cap-and-trade auctions have generated close to \$2 billion in just one year.

When government adopts policies that inflate the cost of producing a commodity, the added costs often get passed to the consumers. The eye-popping amount taken in by the state from the cap-and-trade approach is about equal to a 50-cent increase per gallon of gas, while fuel costs are far less south of the Columbia River. There’s no end in sight unless legislators agree on some cost-controlling reforms in the upcoming session.

No need for major spending hikes

While the state budgets adopted in our 2023 session (operating, capital, transportation) all cover two years, we will reopen them during the 2024 session to make mid-course adjustments. That’s normal and allows us to respond to unexpected developments, like when wildfire-fighting costs come in higher than budgeted.

At nearly \$70 billion, the state operating budget today is more than double (107%) what it was a decade ago – and that doesn’t count money in accounts outside the general fund, generated from cannabis sales and from the Climate Commitment Act spending. A big increase in state-level K-12 funding several years ago contributed to that 10-year climb, but the remainder went to lesser priorities. During this time Washington’s population grew 15%.



With that in mind and the fact Washington families are facing higher prices across the board for food, housing and energy (a 27% increase in the past decade) we see no justification for major new spending, especially going into year two of the state’s fiscal biennium. Instead, we should look to get surplus revenue back in the hands of the taxpayers, who can put it to better use.

2024 SESSION PREVIEW

Action needed on K-12 ‘learning loss’

We realize the COVID-19 pandemic was destructive in countless ways, but it has been over for some time. It concerns us greatly that our state’s K-12 education agency (the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) has little if any sense of urgency about helping students recover the learning opportunities they lost because of pandemic-driven classroom closures.

The results of the spring 2023 student assessments in English and math were made public in September. They show students generally have yet to get back to pre-pandemic performance, even though classrooms have been open more than two full academic years – and for students of color, and students from lower-income families, the gap is even greater.

In spring 2021 our state received \$1.85 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding via the federal American Rescue Plan. At least 20% is to be used for responding to learning loss, and all of the money is to be spent by September 2024. A May 2023 study by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee found the Superintendent of Public Instruction’s office basically failed to keep track of how districts have spent these emergency funds and the outcomes.

Those in charge of K-12 need to do better and be accountable. Learning loss is real, and a September 2023 analysis by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy found the decline in test scores is on average associated with a \$32,000 decrease in future earnings per student. As Washington’s constitution makes providing for K-12 education the “paramount duty” of state government, we will advocate for recovery measures like intensive tutoring and hope to find bipartisan support.



Two paths to increase public safety



Our state is last in the nation – even behind the District of Columbia – for the number of law-enforcement officers relative to population. Not only does the shortage of officers mean longer response times when someone’s life or property is threatened, it also sends a message to criminals that they have less chance of being caught. Local jurisdictions have asked for the Legislature’s help in adding public-safety resources, with mixed success (the new law-enforcement training facility in Clark County being an example of progress).

In 2021 state law was changed to prohibit officers from pursuing suspected criminals in nearly every category, including auto theft. Predictably, a surge of car thefts followed – and for a single parent, losing reliable transportation can be more harmful than

being mugged. While the restrictions on pursuits were loosened slightly during the 2023 session, more can and should be done to discourage would-be criminals.

More resources on the street and stronger deterrents are complementary paths to making our communities safer, and we will look for opportunities in both areas.

SAVE THE DATE FOR 18TH DISTRICT TOWN HALL

We plan to hold two town hall meetings prior to session to hear what's on your mind. We hope you will be able to come and meet with us and offer your input. These meetings will be held on Saturday, January 6. Locations and times are:

**10:00 a.m. Battle Ground City Hall,
109 SW 1st Street**

**12:30 p.m. WSU Vancouver: Dengerink
Building, Room 110 (VDEN 110) Lecture Hall**

18th District Legislative Report

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 1885

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR OUR ONLINE SURVEY



Health care needs continue

Whether you call it mental health or behavioral health, the need for treatment in our state exceeds the supply. Legislators are doing their part from a funding/policy standpoint, but the executive branch needs to step up and actually deliver on the promise of additional bedspace. How else can we provide the access to life-saving treatment that is at the heart of the state's revised drug-possession law?

Case in point, the State Building Code Council has dragged its feet on approving a code revision that would make the construction of small treatment facilities (up to 16 clients) more affordable. That's especially important when public grant money is involved in paying for the project. Up the road in Lewis County, a substance-use treatment facility is years behind schedule because of this bureaucratic red tape.

At the same time, we are determined to get a handle on prescription-drug costs. Senator Rivers has secured bipartisan support for a cost-sharing/fairness bill that debuted in 2023 (Senate Bill 5445) and is poised to move further in the upcoming session. Passing it will mean obtaining concessions from the "pharmacy benefit managers" that have a tremendous amount of influence on drug costs, but this needs to happen.

Focus bridge-replacement project on the bridge

It's already been 10 years since the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project ran out of support on both sides of the river. Knowing there would be (and should be) another attempt to replace the Interstate Bridge connecting Oregon and Washington, legislators in 2017 created a bi-state bridge committee to ensure their concerns would be heard at the front end instead of late in the project, as happened with the CRC.

Put very simply, a bridge is about the project scope and funding. The scope of the Interstate Bridge Replacement project is growing beyond what any of us would have expected, and the price tag along with it. The last thing we need is for this project to lose its way like the previous one did. Let's keep the focus on building a multimodal bridge – cars, freight trucks, transit, foot and bicycle – that doesn't constrain shipping upriver, and avoid weighing the project down with a list of other wishes.

As we head into the 2024 legislative session, don't hesitate to reach out. If we can be of any assistance during this time for our communities, please feel free to contact our offices. It is a pleasure and honor to serve you in the 18th District.