2022 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

MICHELLE CALDIER

26th DISTRICT · STATE REPRESENTATIVE

KEEPING IN TOUCH

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- Health Care and Wellness
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- Appropriations
- Rules

Spring 2022

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 60-day legislative session ended March 10. Just like last year, the 2022 session was mostly held remotely due to COVID. Unfortunately, a lot of bad legislation passed over these two years because the public was kept out of the Capitol and committee rooms, as opposed to previous years.

There is no substitute for face-to-face discussions and in-person debate. When restrictions were relaxed during the last three weeks of this session, I was on the House floor inside the Capitol working for you. During this entire time, I have fought to make your voices heard.

Like any session, we had successes and disappointments. I am disappointed there has been no progress on passing legislation to reform the governor's emergency powers. As other states have discontinued their states of emergency, ours continues with no end in sight – despite repeated efforts to restore balance and trust in state government.

With a $15 billion budget surplus, inflation the highest in 40 years, and gas prices spiking near $5 a gallon, we should have provided tax relief. Unfortunately, we could not get bipartisan support to provide struggling families with real tax relief.

Please know that in every vote I took, I put people before politics. No matter where you stand on the political spectrum, your concerns are important to me. I invite you to read through this newsletter and, if you have any questions or comments, please contact my office in Olympia.

Thank you for the honor of allowing me to proudly serve you and the 26th District!

Sincerely,

Michelle Caldier
State Representative • 26th District

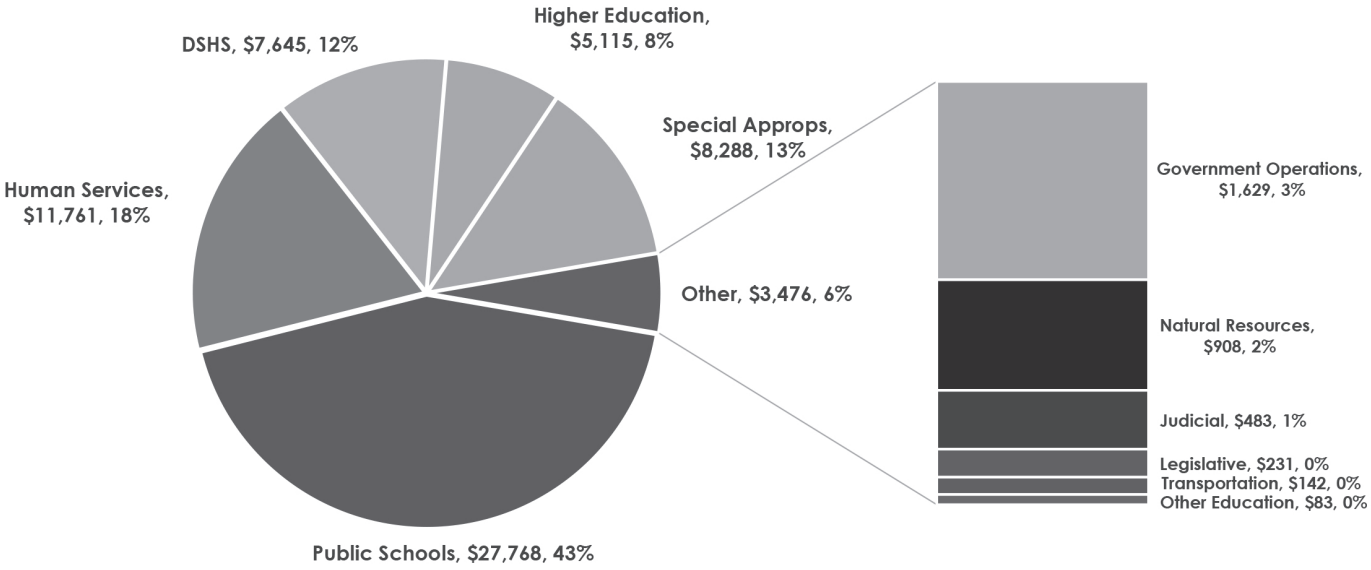
LEARN MORE

If you would like to learn more about me or receive my email updates, visit my website at **RepresentativeMichelleCaldier.com**. Please note that due to election-year restrictions, I am unable to send out email updates from May 16 until December. However, I am always available to meet for coffee or visit your group, business, or classroom. Thank you again for the opportunity and trust you have given me to proudly serve you and the 26th District as your state representative.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE **MICHELLE CALDIER**

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

2021-23 operating budget expenditures (dollars in millions)



SUPPLEMENTAL OPERATING BUDGET INCREASES EDUCATION SPENDING, BUT NO MEANINGFUL TAX RELIEF

The supplemental operating budget increases spending by $6.1 billion, bringing our overall spending in this 2021-23 budget cycle to about $65 billion.

Although the state is doing very well financially, many taxpayers across Washington are struggling to make ends meet and pay their bills, especially with inflation at a 40-year high and soaring gas prices. With the state expecting a $15 billion budget surplus over the next four years, I felt we should have given some of that back in tax relief. Legislation was offered to reduce the property tax, state sales tax, business and occupation taxes on small businesses and those industries hit hardest by the pandemic. Unfortunately, no real tax relief was adopted.

K-12 education is receiving a funding increase over four years. Per pupil spending is also up significantly as you can see in the chart below:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Enrollment	1,103,195	1,063,049	1,063,893	1,069,921
State Per Pupil	$12,277	$12,354	$12,899	$13,608
State + Federal Per Pupil	$12,291	$12,594	$14,183	$14,883
State + Federal + Local Per Pupil	$13,886	$14,536	$16,290	$17,108

Due to COVID, the 2022 legislative session was largely held remotely. However, during the last three weeks of the session, some restrictions were relaxed that allowed more lawmakers on the House floor to vote and debate bills. They were still required to wear masks. Rep. Michelle Caldier was among lawmakers who participated on the House floor. Here, she discusses legislation with Rep. Skyler Rude, R-Walla Walla, as Minority Floor Leader Jacquelin Maycumber, R-Republic, listens.

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REDUCING TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE TOLLS

Since taking office in 2015, I have worked to provide true toll relief to the commuters of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

I was part of a Tacoma Narrows Bridge Work Group in 2017 that addressed the unfairness and inequities of the tolls. Out of that work group came bipartisan legislation I co-sponsored in 2018 that would have provided $125 million to reduce tolls. Unfortunately, budget negotiations failed, and the bill did not advance. Instead, the Legislature extended repayment of the bridge loans and resulted in increased tolls by 25 cents, costing 26th District commuters millions of dollars.

I promised to fight to get our fair share from the Legislature for meaningful toll relief. I took that promise seriously, which is why this year I co-sponsored a House bill that provided $130 million from the general fund to lower the bridge loan and reduce the toll rates by 75 cents. The companion legislation, Senate Bill 5488, sponsored by Sen. Emily Randall, D-Bremerton, was the modified measure that passed. This bill will reduce the tolls. However, the exact amount will be set by the Transportation Commission.

All three 26th District legislators supported this bill. This should not be a partisan issue. It will be the first time since I took office that we will have true toll relief.

LONG-TERM CARE PAYROLL TAX AND INSURANCE PLAN PUNTED

The Legislature passed House Bill 1087 in 2019 to create the WA Cares Fund, administered by the state and funded through a payroll tax. Under the program that was to have taken effect January 1, workers would have been required to pay $0.58 per $100 of their earnings to fund the program. This would provide a lifetime maximum benefit of $36,500.

This program had many flaws. The Office of the State Actuary warned of its insolvency. It said future benefits might have to be reduced or future payroll taxes may have to be increased to ensure solvency. Others who pay into the system might also never receive benefits. The public has expressed outrage at the payroll tax – and justifiably so.

Given these many problems and inequities, legislation was offered to repeal and replace the program but did not pass. Instead, the majority party punted on this issue and voted to delay the program and tax collections until next year. I am still concerned that unless the Legislature takes further action, the payroll tax will resume in July 2023.

ARE WE STILL UNDER A STATE OF EMERGENCY?

This is the question I get asked about most. Unfortunately, the answer is yes. The governor called the state of emergency more than two years ago on February 28, 2020. And there's no end in sight. Washington's state-of-emergency law was intended to provide temporary power to the governor in case of war, an earthquake, or other disaster, until the Legislature met. It was never meant to provide unbridled powers to the governor.

During the past two sessions, I co-sponsored numerous bills to restore balance and trust in state government. Unfortunately, majority party leadership blocked every reform bill. It shouldn't matter whether the governor is Democrat or Republican. What matters is that the citizens of Washington through their elected legislators should have their voices heard.

Very few states remain under emergency proclamation. Most states are back to normal. Unless we can get enough bipartisan support to call a special session, nothing is likely to change.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE **MICHELLE CALDIER**

CAPITAL BUDGET RETURNS MONEY TO THE 26TH DISTRICT

I was pleased to join other legislators in unanimously passing a bipartisan supplemental capital budget that funds construction and maintenance of state buildings, public schools, higher-education facilities, public lands, parks, and other assets throughout Washington. Here in the 26th District, this budget allocates $14.2 million for local projects, including:

- $11 million for modernization of the West Sound Technical Skills Center in Bremerton.
- $2 million for day use development of Kopachuck State Park near Gig Harbor.
- $1.4 million for the YMCA's Camp Colman cabin preservation and upgrades near Longbranch.

Funding is also provided for Peninsula Community Health Services, Kiwanis Park playground accessibility upgrades in Bremerton, restoration and bridge construction at Harper Estuary in Port Orchard, a new HVAC system for the Bremerton Library, and the Gig Harbor Senior Center office.

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GET MORE INFORMATION, GET MORE INVOLVED!

Citizen awareness and involvement are vital to our state's legislative process. I work for you throughout the year, not just when the Legislature is in session. I invite and encourage you to contact my office any time you have questions, comments, or suggestions about legislation, or need help navigating state government.

VISIT MY WEBSITE

Sign up for my email updates, read my news releases, learn more about my bills and how I am working for you:

RepresentativeMichelleCaldier.com

- Learn more about the Legislature: **leg.wa.gov**
- Call the Legislative Hotline: **1-800-562-6000**
- Watch floor and committee action on TVW: **TVW.org**
- House Republicans: **houserepublicans.wa.gov**