# 2026 END OF SESSION UPDATE

## 39TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## REP. CAROLYN ESLICK


**CAPITOL OFFICE**
436 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**EMAIL:** Carolyn.Eslick@leg.wa.gov

**PHONE**
**Toll Free:** (800) 562-6000
**Direct Line:** (360) 786-7816
**Mobile Phone:** (425) 327-2093

**WEBSITE:**
representativecarolyneslick.com


**COMMITTEES:**
- Early Learning & Human Services *(Ranking Member)*
- Capital Budget
- Education

## REP. SAM LOW


**CAPITOL OFFICE**
122D Legislative Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**EMAIL:** Sam.Low@leg.wa.gov

**PHONE**
**Toll Free:** (800) 562-6000
**Direct Line:** (360) 786-7967

**WEBSITE:**
representativesamlow.com


**COMMITTEES:**
- Housing (*Ranking Member*)
- Transportation (*Assistant Ranking Member*)
- Health Care & Wellness

**Dear Friends and Neighbors,**

As we reflect on the past two years, we are so grateful for the opportunity to serve the people of the 39th District. This biennium brought opportunities and challenges alike, and we approached our work in Olympia with one goal in mind: delivering results for you and your family.

We are proud that we were able to help secure transportation and capital budget investments across the district and advance practical and reform-oriented legislation that will truly make a difference. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned about the direction of our state under one-party rule and the affordability challenges facing so many families.

Washington is the fifth most expensive state in the country. Families are paying more for gas, groceries, housing, child care, and other essentials. In recent years, we have seen majority Democrats take a massive budget surplus, turn it into a deficit, pass record tax increases, and then spend even more of your money.

Last year, they passed a record $12.5 billion in tax increases. This year, they returned and passed a new state income tax that we believe will eventually hit everyone. They also relied on one-time budget maneuvers and depleted reserves to increase spending and pass an $80 billion operating budget — the largest in state history.

Despite all of the taxes and spending, Washingtonians are not seeing the results they deserve. To make matters worse, our state now ranks last in the nation in total reserves and has less than a month's worth of funding on hand to keep state government running. Our rainy day fund is also in troubling shape, with less than two weeks of reserves set aside.

House Republicans warned about all of this and advocated for a different approach. We fought for affordability, more responsible budgeting, stronger long-term infrastructure, and practical solutions that reflect the needs of our district. Being in the minority, we did not win every fight, but we stayed engaged, pushed back when it mattered, and delivered results wherever we could.

In this mailer, you will find an overview of the biennium, key budget decisions, local investments in our district, and updates on the issues we have been working on.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. It is an honor.

Carolyn Eslick

Rep. Carolyn Eslick

Rep. Sam Low

# REPRESENTATIVES ESLICK & LOW 39TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## REP. CAROLYN ESLICK

After nearly a decade in the Legislature and almost 30 years in public service, I have decided not to seek reelection at the end of my current term. It has been an honor to represent the 39th District and to spend these years working on behalf of the children, families, and communities that make this region home.

Throughout my time in office, I have focused on practical efforts to strengthen families, improve behavioral health services, expand access to early support, and help people get connected to services before problems become crises.

During the 2026 session, I was proud to help pass several bills into law, including:

- **HB 2317:** Removing duplicative licensing requirements that delayed the opening of preschool classrooms and limited access for working families.
- **HB 2323:** Creating a statewide Blue Envelope Program to improve communication and safety during traffic stops for neurodivergent individuals.
- **HB 2505:** Protecting housing stability for young adults leaving foster care by allowing them to remain with established caregivers.

That work built on a broader record of bipartisan service. In 2021, I sponsored legislation establishing a statewide definition for family resource centers, helping formalize a model that connects families to services, strengthens stability, and supports prevention. This biennium, I also co-sponsored legislation making Washington Thriving the state's roadmap for behavioral health from before birth through age 25, and supported efforts to strengthen the child care workforce and improve access for working families.

I was also proud to help secure funding for important local projects, including support for the STAR Center in Sedro-Woolley, a behavioral health facility that is already helping people facing mental health and substance use challenges.

Public service has always been about helping people, solving problems, and strengthening communities. I am deeply grateful for the trust the people of the 39th District have placed in me, and I look forward to continuing that work in new ways in the years ahead.

## REP. SAM LOW

Over the past two years, I have worked to advance practical legislation and stay focused on the issues that matter most to families in our district. Several of my bills received broad bipartisan support and were signed into law, including:

**HB 1345: Rural accessory dwelling units**

Creates a framework for counties to allow detached ADUs in rural areas outside urban growth boundaries, opening the door for more backyard cottages and in-law suites where housing supply is limited.

**HB 1261: Agritourism protections for family farms**

Protects farms that host incidental agritourism activities, such as pumpkin patches, weddings, hayrides, and farm tours, so they are not hit with unfair tax penalties or stripped of open space protections.

**HB 2192: Traffic safety review and prevention**

Improves the state's ability to study deadly and serious-injury crashes, identify causes like impaired driving, distraction, and speeding, and turn those findings into better safety recommendations to save lives on our roadways.

**HB 2441: Health coverage protection for families of fallen first responders**

Closes a gap in state law so surviving spouses, domestic partners, and dependent children of law enforcement officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty are not left paying health coverage costs out of pocket while eligibility is reviewed.

**HB 1007: Fairness in small claims court**

Prevents default judgments when no one appears and no actual damages are proven, giving judges more discretion to avoid unjust outcomes.

**HB 1822: Work zone safety training**

Although the original bill I sponsored did not pass, its language was incorporated into another bill to help improve work zone safety training for new drivers.

As ranking member on the House Housing Committee and assistant ranking member on the House Transportation Committee, I also spent the biennium working on two of the biggest challenges facing our state.

Housing in Washington is simply too expensive. The median price of a new home is nearly $650,000, and most Washington households cannot afford one. If we want lower housing costs, we need more housing and a system that makes it easier to build, easier to permit, and easier for communities to add practical options that reflect local needs.

Transportation is also in need of serious reform. Washington's highway system ranks 48th in the nation overall for cost-effectiveness and condition, and the state failed to rank in the top 20 in any category measured in Reason Foundation's most recent highway report. Despite all the money being spent, the system is not delivering the results people deserve. There is a great deal of work ahead, and I will keep pushing for better infrastructure, stronger accountability, and a more affordable future.

# REPRESENTATIVES ESLICK & LOW 39TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## OPERATING BUDGET

The operating budget affects nearly every part of state government, yet House Republicans are shut out of the final budget-writing process. That means the voices of millions of Washingtonians are excluded while the majority makes the biggest financial decisions in the state.

Unfortunately, the results speak for themselves.

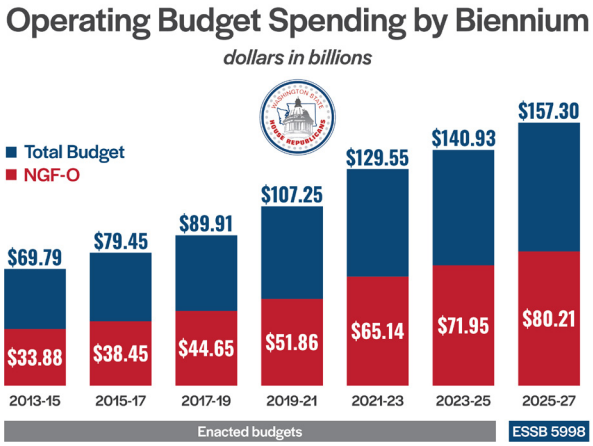
Instead of focusing on fiscal discipline in recent years, majority Democrats have taken a budget surplus, turned it into a deficit, passed record tax increases, and failed to put the state on stable long-term footing. The latest budget increases spending by another $2.3 billion and spends $4.9 billion more than the state is expected to collect in the 2025-27 biennium.

Despite our warnings this session, they relied on more taxes, reserve withdrawals, fund shifts, and one-time maneuvers to prop up ongoing spending. They even assumed another $2.7 billion in tax increases over the four-year outlook, including money from the new state income tax before it is even scheduled to take effect.

That is irresponsible budgeting. Washington now ranks dead last in the nation in total reserves and has less than a month's worth of funding on hand to keep state government operating. The rainy day fund is also in weak shape, with less than two weeks of reserves set aside. Most states are in far better condition.

The deeper problem is that taxpayers are being asked to send more and more money to Olympia without seeing better results in return. In an $80.2 billion operating budget, there will always be worthwhile items. But when spending has more than doubled over roughly a decade and the state is still stuck in a tax-and-spend cycle with weak reserves and poor outcomes, something is clearly not working.

Washington families deserve better.




## TRANSPORTATION BUDGET

December's flooding took a heavy toll on communities across the 39th District. Hamilton was among the hardest hit, along with communities along the Skagit River corridor from Marblemount to Sedro-Woolley. The families still recovering remain in our thoughts and prayers.

Throughout December, we met four times with state leadership to push for flood relief and reopen critical routes. Restoring access on Highway 530 between Rockport and Darrington was a top priority, along with reopening Highway 2. We are grateful to the Washington State Department of Transportation and the crews who worked under difficult conditions to reopen those roads. Even amid those emergency demands, we worked to keep funding for the Highway 9 Snohomish River bridge crossing south of Lake Stevens and other 39th District projects on track this biennium.

More than anything, what happened in December underscored the need for lawmakers to pass transportation budgets focused on real infrastructure demands. Unfortunately, we continue to fall short.

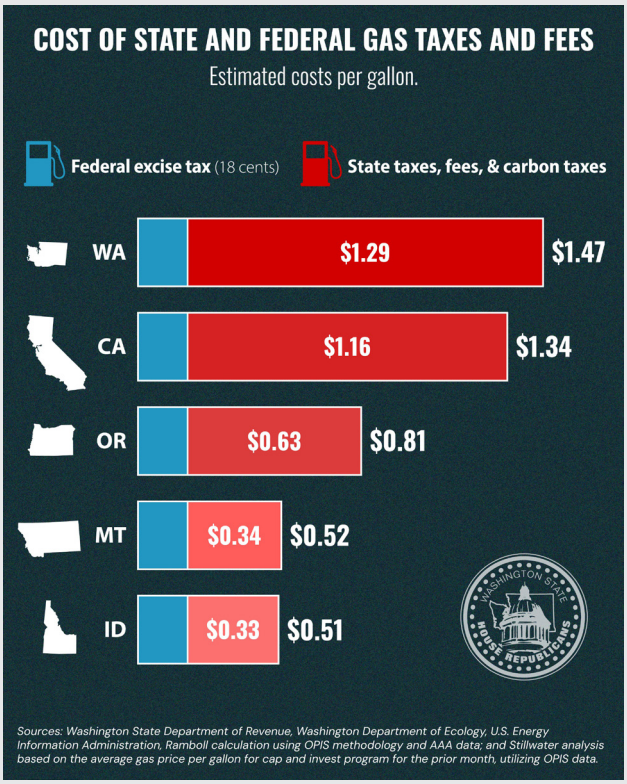
Reason Foundation's 29th Annual Highway Report ranked Washington 48th overall for cost-effectiveness and condition, and last for highway construction and bridge spending. A separate WalletHub study ranked Washington the second-worst state to drive in based on 31 measures of commute and driving conditions.

Those results would be troubling on their own. They are even harder to justify when the state keeps asking drivers to pay more.

Last year, Democrats passed a $15.5 billion transportation budget built in part on gas and diesel tax hikes. House Republicans opposed that approach and instead proposed making Climate Commitment Act revenue available for roads and bridges. That proposal was rejected.

Drivers are paying an estimated 52 cents more per gallon because of the CCA, yet those dollars still cannot fully be used for the roads and bridges people rely on every day. Instead, they are being set aside for hybrid buses, bike lanes, and projects focused on environmental justice. In total, Washington drivers now pay about $1.29 per gallon in state gas taxes, carbon taxes, and fees. What they're getting in return is abysmal.

If the state is going to take that much from drivers, the least it can do is deliver safer roads, stronger bridges, and a transportation system that actually works.



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**REPRESENTATIVES**
**ESLICK & LOW**
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



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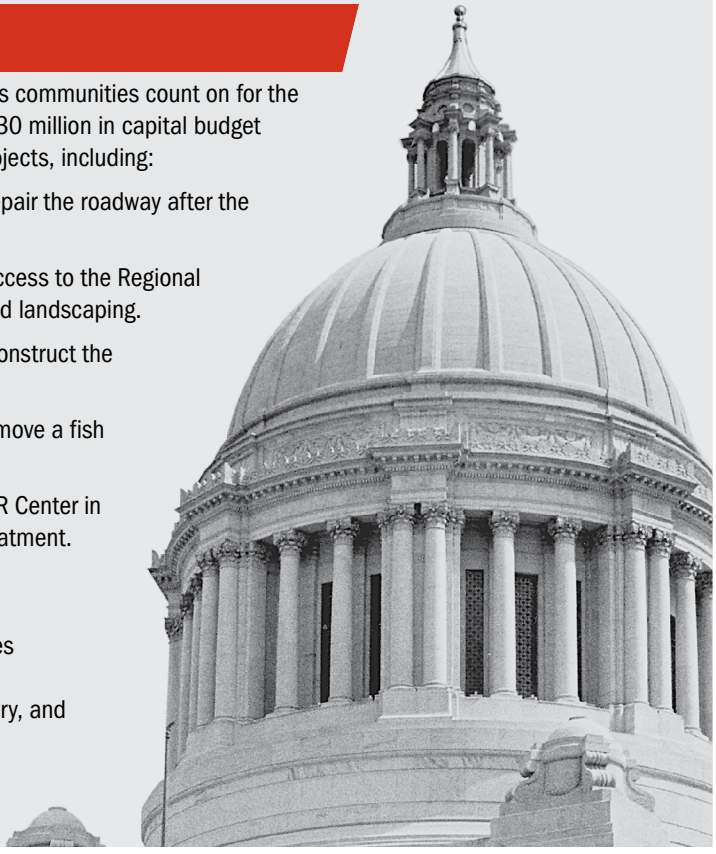
## REPRESENTATIVES ESLICK & LOW 39TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

## CAPITAL BUDGET

The capital budget is how the state funds the local facilities and improvements communities count on for the long term. Working with Sen. Keith Wagoner and local partners, we secured $30 million in capital budget funding for the district last year. This year, we added another $6 million for projects, including:

- Burpee Hill Road in Concrete — $464,000 to stabilize the landslide and repair the roadway after the severe storms in December 2025.
- Community Campus parking lot in Granite Falls — $463,000 to improve access to the Regional Services Campus with off-street parking, stormwater drainage, lighting, and landscaping.
- Legion Park Plaza Veterans Memorial in Granite Falls — $93,000 to help construct the veterans memorial.
- Lorenzan Creek fish passage and culvert improvements — $1 million to remove a fish barrier and install a passable culvert at Concrete Sauk Valley Road.

It was also an honor to attend the recent ribbon-cutting ceremony for the STAR Center in Sedro-Woolley, a 48-bed facility for voluntary mental health and addiction treatment. We helped secure $12 million for the project in prior years and the remaining $549,000 last year.

Serving in the minority means local priorities do not move on their own. It takes persistence, coordination, and a willingness to keep pushing for projects that matter. These investments will improve safety, expand access, support recovery, and strengthen communities across our district for years to come.