



Lynnwood Public Works Director Bill Franz retires **P5**



Auditions now open to join Seattle Men's Chorus **P4**



Everett Herald reporters are striking back **P8**

Real News Real Impact

Snohomish PUD says farewell to Commissioner Rebecca Wolfe



Outgoing Snohomish Public Utility Commissioner Rebecca Wolfe (third from left) with incoming Commissioner, Lynnwood Council Vice President Julieta Altamirano-Crosby (center), and family and friends at a reception held on December 17 in honor of Commissioner Wolfe at Snohomish PUD building. Lynnwood Times | Mario Lotmore.

By MARIO LOTMORE

EVERETT—Snohomish Public Utility honored outgoing Commissioner Rebecca Wolfe with a reception following the final meeting of the year on Tuesday, December 17. Wolfe did not seek re-election this year to retire and spend time with her family.

“She came into the utility with no background in the industry but quickly picked it up,” fellow Commissioner Toni Olson of Everett (District 3) told the Lynnwood Times. “I was very impressed because this is a very technical industry. She brought with her expertise in environmental affairs and govern-

ment planning; she is a delightful person [to work with].”

Wolfe swore in as the District 2 Snohomish PUD Commissioner on January 8, 2019. She holds degrees in English (bachelor’s and master’s degrees), Organizational Leadership (PhD), and Environmental Law and Policy (Masters). She worked as a career educator in K-12, college, and university settings. Commissioner Wolfe has served on the City of Edmonds’ Economic Development Commission, Tree Board, and Mayor’s Climate Protection Committee.

Her other community service includes Carpe Diem West: Healthy Headwaters;

The Alliance for Democracy; National Audubon Society, Education Director for San Juan Islands chapter; Sierra Club: Local, State, and National levels; and Our Children’s Trust, where she was a volunteer and advocate for the Public Trust Doctrine and a healthy atmosphere.

Follow Commissioner Sidney (Sid) Logan of Arlington (District 1), shared at the reception Wolfe’s legacy with the utility of environmental stewardship.

“I would like to thank Commissioner Wolfe for her six years of service, her

Continued **PAGE 10**

Governor proposes \$70 billion biennium budget with new 1% wealth tax

By KIENAN BRISCOE

OLYMPIA—Governor Jay Inslee held a press conference on Tuesday, December 17, addressing his proposed \$69.8 billion 2025-2027 biennium state budget in what very well might be the last press conference he ever holds as Governor.

“I want to express pride in Washington today and this announcement we’re making today. I was so in love with Washington when I started this job and I’m much more in love with her now. The qualities of Washington that I’ve seen and experienced and we’re going to present a budget today that will continue the reasons for that pride,” said Inslee.

A breakdown of the proposed budget is as follows:

- Housing: \$905 million for 5,000 additional affordable housing units, homelessness services, and preventing evictions and foreclosures.
- Behavioral health: \$719 million to continue expanding access to mental health and substance use treatment and recovery services.
- K-12: An additional \$1.3 billion for K-12 schools to support increased costs for maintenance, supplies, technology and educator compensation.
- Childcare and early learning: \$510 million to improve provider subsidy rates for Working Connections Child Care. \$48 million for increased ECEAP rates school and right-sizing the program to reduce unused part day slots and create 750 school day slots. Expanded entitlement for ECEAP is delayed.
- Public safety: \$3.5 million to maintain the recent expansion of training for local corrections officers. \$7 million for 60 additional state law enforcement officers, and \$13 million for deployment of speed cameras to reduce work zone injuries and deaths. \$33 million to open a new juvenile rehabilitation center.
- College and career training: \$6 million to continue full funding for Career Connect Washington and \$182

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Larsen holds town hall, selected as top Dem on House Transportation & Infrastructure Cmte

By KIENAN BRISCOE

EDMONDS—United States Representative Rick Larsen (WA-02) hosted an in-person town hall event in Edmonds on Sunday, December 15, to discuss his priorities for the 119th Congress and hear directly from his constituents who he represents in Washington’s second Congressional District. He hosted a similar event in Ferndale the prior day.

For someone that has received over 40,000 emails from people expressing their views, in 2024 alone, Larsen said that holding town hall events with his constituents is not only a valuable way of informing them what he’s done over



Representative Rick Larsen (WA-02) speaking at his in-person town hall event in Edmonds on Sunday, December 15, discussing his priorities for the 119th Congress Lynnwood Times | Mario Lotmore

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‘Friday the 13th’ budget protest: Exec will not sign Council-adopted budget

By MARIO LOTMORE

EVERETT—In a surprising use of his authority, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers, known for his reserved and sagacious leadership, announced late Friday afternoon that he will not sign the \$3.22 billion 2025-26 biennium Council-adopted budget.

“Since receiving the budget from the County Council on November 27, my team and I have been carefully reviewing what was adopted,” Somers wrote in a statement. “While I did strongly consider a veto, I have instead decided to allow the budget to be enacted without my signature.”

Somers delivered the county’s first biennial budget to the County Council on Wednesday, September 4. The proposed budget prioritized public safety, continued efforts to protect the land and water, preserved existing programs focused on addressing the drug crisis, provided direct health services through the Health Department while also continuing to direct resources to the Department of Public Works, and other countywide services.

However, the weeks leading up to the approval of the budget on November 25 were met with a heated public hearing on a proposed property tax increase and controversy surrounding an audit finding of “duplicative” and “overlapping” staff positions which led to the ousting of former Sheriff Ty Trenary. In February of 2020, Somers appointed Trenary as Senior Policy Analyst—a newly created position—to focus on public safety and issues that intersected with multiple departments and agencies.

A week after the damning audit report by George Skiles, Partner at Sjoberg-Evan-shenk Consulting, and a two-and-a-half hour public hearing a week before that, County Executive Somers stood firm and cleared the air on his proposed budget saying: “My proposed budget does not add or remove programs. We are striving to hold steady in the coming biennium, despite a systemic budget shortfall as revenues fail to keep pace with rising costs. Snohomish County has a track record of making the most with limited resources, and I am mindful of the impact any increase in the county’s property tax levy could have on people.”

Executive Somers somewhat echoed this with Friday’s remarks on not signing the Council-adopted budget elaborating further stating that his proposed budget was “responsible and balanced.”

“[The proposed budget] included spend-

ing cuts across departments and offices that totaled about \$8 million annually, rejected nearly every request received by county departments for new general fund positions, and included a modest property tax increase of about \$2 per month or \$24 per year on an average-valued home by 2026. My goal was – and will always remain – to make sure we can balance our budget, fulfill our responsibilities, and continue to run an efficient county government,” Somers wrote.

County Council President Jared Mead commended Somers for “putting the interests of our county” first by not exercising his veto power to reject the budget.

“I’d like to thank Executive Somers for his careful consideration of the budget,” Council President Mead wrote in a statement to the Lynnwood Times. “I recognize we did not agree on every aspect of the final product but we did agree on the vast majority.”

“The fact that Executive Somers decided against exercising his veto authority despite his disagreement with certain aspects of the final product shows he is putting the interests of our county before the ‘all or nothing’ politics that plagues our country at the national level. This entire process reflects the kind of compromise and leadership our residents expect of us in Snohomish County.”

Mead along with council members Megan Dunn and Strom Peterson all voted in favor of the biennium budget with Council Vice President Nate Nehring and Sam Low voting against.

“I voted ‘no’ on the budget as I don’t believe it was appropriate to raise property taxes without a more serious look at spending reductions,” Council Vice President Nehring wrote in a statement to the Lynnwood Times on Somers refusal to sign the budget. “I will continue to advocate for fiscal restraint on behalf of the taxpayers we are elected to represent.”

Because the County Council has an upcoming two-week winter recess, Somers shared that there was not sufficient time to resolve disagreements with the County-adopted budget without risking a temporary shutdown of county government, something he vehemently wanted to avoid.

“That [a government shutdown] would be unacceptable and I cannot in good conscience do that to our dedicated employees or to the public we serve,” wrote Somers. “Over the next two years, I will work with my team to identify measures

and strategies to lessen the negative impacts of this budget if it were to be fully enacted as adopted.”

Snohomish County, which remains one of the most populous counties in Washington State, has one of the smallest General Fund budgets per capita. It’s about 73% that of Pierce County, which is of comparable size, and has the lowest tax rate out of King, Pierce, and Snohomish. The county has about a \$10 million shortfall every year just to keep up with cost increases for salaries and benefits for county employees. One of the reasons the county moved to a bi-

ennial budget this year is to be smarter about its General Fund resources, alleviating the amount of work done every other year by a more efficient budget process.

With the opioid epidemic plaguing communities, and over 75% of the General Fund budget already being directed towards public safety, the County placed a 0.2% sales tax increase on the November General Election which would have gone towards bolstering public safety funds. However, voters overwhelmingly voted that down by almost 14 points.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

PUBLISHER Mario Lotmore publisher@lynnwoodtimes.com	SENIOR STAFF REPORTER Kienan Briscoe kienan.briscoe@lynnwoodtimes.com
MARKETING SPECIALIST JP Ellis sales@lynnwoodtimes.com	REPORTERS Kayvon Bumpus kayvon.bumpus@gmail.com Gerti Katro gertikatro@gmail.com Merrick Parnell mparnell.broadcasting@gmail.com
DISTRIBUTION Jim Sullivan (206) 550-8332	

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12918 Mukilteo Speedway C23, PMB-162 Lynnwood, WA 98087
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5 tips on staying connected during the holidays



It's the holiday season, a time of gratitude, joy and connection. Whether it's gathering with friends and family over a festive meal, celebrating another year with coworkers at a company party or just catching up with those closest to you – even if they're miles away – the holidays are meant to be shared, and Comcast can help.

"We know how important staying connected with friends and family is, especially during the holidays," said Rigo Topete, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Comcast Pacific Northwest.

Here are five tips on how to stay connected this holiday season.

Hang out (virtually)

Can't fly over to Mom and Dad's for Christmas this year? Don't panic. It's pretty easy these days to plan video calls and virtual get-togethers. Get creative and use a video call to read a story to your child or grandchild. Maybe connect with those old college friends spread across the country for happy hour. Or watch a movie together. Just make sure you have fast, reliable internet. For example, Comcast offers plans that start at 150 megabytes per second,

which are perfect for video calls. Don't yet have a monthly internet plan? Comcast's NOW Internet is a low-cost, reliable, pay-as-you-go internet service.

Make the call

It's always nice to hear the voices of loved ones and share texts and photos this time of year. And with a lot of people traveling during the holidays, it's vital to have a reliable mobile plan no matter where you might be in the world. Talking to your kids, old friends or just sending the latest memes all helps keep us connected, especially when separated from those we love. Xfinity Mobile, available to Comcast internet customers, has unlimited or By the Gig data and fast, high-priority mobile speeds. Plus, customers who sign up for Xfinity Mobile can save on their internet plan. Comcast also offers NOW Mobile, affordable monthly plans with unlimited talk, text and data, as well as access to millions of free Xfinity WiFi hotspots across the country.

Gather 'round

"A Christmas Story." "Christmas Vacation." "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." The list of favorite holiday movies and shows goes on

and on. It wouldn't be the holidays without gathering around the TV to enjoy a classic together. With Xfinity, holiday movies and shows are at your fingertips, streaming on your favorite services through Xfinity Internet or on Xfinity X1, which offers live TV, DVR, sports and streaming. Your hardest decision will be how much popcorn to make.

Root for your team

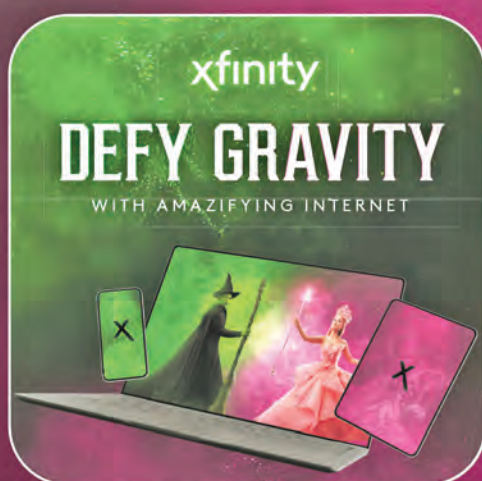
Does your family have a favorite football team? Is your alma mater playing? Set up a video call to watch the game together or record it on your Xfinity DVR so that the whole family can watch it after dinner.

Game on

Online gaming continues to evolve and provides many gamers with opportunities to make friends and be social. Or you can play online games with family at home together, maybe in competition with one another. Playing online requires a reliable, fast connection with high bandwidth. Make sure your internet can handle it. Comcast has plans that range up to 2,000 Mbps, providing the best connections and experiences for online gamers.

These are just some of the ways to stay connected during the holidays, but it all requires a solid, reliable network for broadband internet and mobile phones. Make sure you choose a provider that hasn't skimped on their network. For example, Comcast boasts 99.9% reliability and even uses artificial intelligence to keep customers connected by fixing issues before they cause disruptions. The company has also made major improvements to its technology in Washington, investing more than \$1 billion in infrastructure – including to its broadband network – in recent years. Here in Snohomish County, that work has helped make services available to more than 1,500 homes and businesses for the holidays.

For more information on staying connected this holiday season, visit www.xfinity.com.



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Auditions now open to join Seattle Men's Chorus

By SEATTLE MEN'S CHORUS

SEATTLE—Seattle Men's Chorus is once again opening its doors to new chorus members with auditions on Monday, January 6 from 6-9:30 p.m., and Saturday, January 11 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. All participants are required to register online before auditioning.

SCAN TO APPLY



The Seattle Men's Chorus is once again opening its doors to new chorus members with auditions starting Monday, January 6, 2025. SOURCE: The Seattle Men's Chorus

The Seattle Men's Chorus is among the largest — and longest-running — LGBTQ-identified choruses in the world. The Chorus turned 45 in 2024 with more than 200 members.

Established in 1979, the Seattle Men's Chorus has performed at locations across the U.S., such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Boston Symphony Hall, and has toured internationally in Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The Chorus has commissioned original compositions from renowned composers like John Corigliano, Gian Carlo Menotti, Ned Rorem, and David Diamond. Their shows have showcased performances with notable guest stars from stage and screen, including Nina West, Harvey Fierstein, Megan Mullally, Kristin Chenoweth, Megan Hilty, and Tituss Burgess.

Known for its annual holiday performances — including this year's popular Ho Ho Ho: Seattle Men's Chorus Holiday Show with performances running through Dec. 21 — the Chorus entertains audiences year-round with a mix of classic tunes and contemporary hits, all enhanced by creative costumes and choreography.

The upcoming auditions for 2025 in-

clude the Chorus' new spring concert, Seattle Men's Chorus Salutes Dolly Parton from April 5-May 18 with performances in Seattle, Bellingham, Everett and Tacoma.

The Seattle Men's Chorus values diversity within its ranks. While the Chorus has worked to cultivate a more diverse group of singers, rising to 23% in 2024 compared to 16% in 2022, it knows it can always do better to reflect the

community and creators it serves. The Chorus aims to expand this diversity through the upcoming auditions.

"Seeing a Seattle Men's Chorus performance affirmed exactly what I was meant to be doing at that time," said Charlie Porter, who joined the Seattle Men's Chorus in 2022. "It was a profound moment for me, seeing people of color on stage, embodying the same values and representation I aspire to bring."

Seattle Men's Chorus rehearsal obligations include Monday evenings through performance week and at minimum one Saturday rehearsal each concert cycle.

"Making music with the Seattle Men's Chorus is a gift that I get all year," said Paul Caldwell, Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus artistic director. "To be a part of this amazing group of people is very special. I look forward to including as many members as we can."

Those interested in auditioning are encouraged to complete this form on the Seattle Men's Chorus website, and audition details will be distributed via email.

Snohomish County's Giant Menorah Lighting celebration for December 29

By LYNNWOOD TIMES STAFF

LYNNWOOD—It is important to highlight and celebrate light and freedom in a world so often plagued with tragedy and hate. Chabad Jewish Center of Snohomish County therefore invites you to celebrate the Festival of Lights with the 13th annual Giant Menorah Lighting & Celebration, celebrating the light and joy of our shared freedoms and the immeasurable value of every human being.

"At this fraught time for the Jewish community, with war in Israel and American Jews facing a major rise in antisemitism, this year we are doing more to celebrate Hanukkah with joy and Jewish pride," said Rabbi Berel Paltiel. "The Menorah and Hanukkah represent freedom of the human spirit, freedom from tyranny and oppression, and of the victory of good over evil."

The Lynnwood Giant Menorah Lighting & Celebration will take place at 4:00 pm on Sunday, December 29, at

the Lynnwood City Center Light Rail Station. The event will feature the kindling of the giant nine-foot Menorah, delicious Holiday treats, face painting, balloon twisting, personal Menorah kits, and a Hanukkah musical performance by the Seattle based Klez Katz Klezmer band. Special this year: ladder truck from South County Fire will create an unforgettable experience for the kids with a thrilling "Gelt Drop," showering chocolate coins from above!

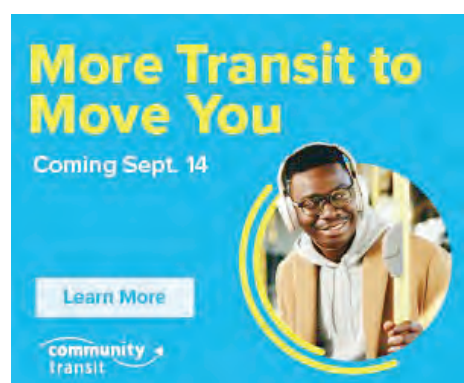
Remarks will be shared by Rabbi Berel Paltiel of the Chabad Jewish Center of Snohomish County, as well as by local dignitaries including County Executive Dave Somers.

This year's celebration carries added significance as it marks 50 years since the first public menorah in the US which was lit at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia in 1974. The public menorah was lit after the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of blessed memory, launched the worldwide Hanukkah campaign in 1973 to build awareness and promote the celebration of Hanukkah. Today, public menorahs and Hanukkah displays have become a staple of Jewish cultural and American public life, forever altering the Ameri-

can practice and perception of the festival.

"Celebrating Hanukkah is a potent point of light," added Rabbi Paltiel.

"The celebration of Hanukkah underscores the G-d endowed liberty that is at the heart of what America represents."



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Lynnwood Public Works Director Bill Franz retires

By KIENAN BRISCOE

LYNNWOOD—After 30-plus years serving the city of Lynnwood, and Public Works Director for the last 16 of those years, Bill Franz is officially retiring this Friday, December 13. He informed the Lynnwood Times that while his tenure serving the people of Lynnwood has been invaluable, he is looking forward to having the time to play music, travel, spend time with his six grandchildren, and get some work done around his house in Mukilteo.

Franz received his degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Washington and landed his first job out of college working for the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT). After that his career led him to King County Building and Land.

While working for King County Franz and his wife purchased their first home in Lynnwood, Washington, and fell immediately in love. To serve the community he was becoming to know as his own, and to cut down on the commute to Bellevue, Franz applied for, and was subsequently hired, by Lynnwood as an entry level Civil Engineer in 1991.

Throughout the years he moved up through the ranks to Public Works Director in 2004, spearheading some of the most pivotal Public Works projects in Lynnwood's history in preparation for a projected population boom and laying the groundwork for the Sound Transit Link light rail which opened earlier this year.

A lot of that work focused on the city's water and sewage systems, updating pumps in and around the City Center to free up capacity for urban growth. Franz also laid the groundwork for updating the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant which will hopefully be seeing these plans come to fruition in the next few years.

As far as transportation projects go, the two decade-long 196th Street construction process came to a close last year, as well as the rebuilding of 36th Avenue West two years ago, and building two bridges—one over 44th and one over Interstate 5 which are key to allowing commuters in and out of Lynnwood's Transit Center.

If Franz could choose just one of these projects that he is most proud of working on over the years he informed the Lynnwood Times, it would have to boil down to the 196th Street project.

"196th especially could be a bottleneck before and now I drive up and down that road any time of the night and know I won't hit traffic because of all the capacity we added there," said Franz. "Plus, it's just a beautiful street with



Lynnwood Public Works Director Bill Franz speaking at the 196th Street ribbon-cutting celebrating the completion of the \$48 million improvement project. Lynnwood Times | Mario Lotmore.

the boulevard section we added now, the sidewalks; it's a real welcome to the new Lynnwood and we got it done right before the rail opened which was our goal."

Franz's Department also had the opportunity of leveraging federal American Rescue Plan Act funds, over his career, to dedicate additional dollars on focusing on neighborhood roads such as paving a graveled road on 204th, which was a bucket list item for Franz because it creates a safer route to the nearby school for children.

Now with retirement on the horizon, Franz informed the Lynnwood Times that he has faith that the Public Works team, paired with the City's Comprehensive Plan, will continue to do great work without him at the helm.

"The City's in excellent hands. We have a staff who really knows what they're doing and we have great consultant help too," said Franz.

Franz continued that after years of working as a Civil Engineer, although he's retiring, he suspects he will never lose his "engineering eye." Even while traveling he finds himself constantly taking pictures of catch bases and different city planning decisions.

He continued that his favorite part about his job has been seeing a project through, from conception to completion, sometimes taking decades to put together.

"Lynnwood will always feel like home to me and I'll be driving these streets probably forever," said Franz who joked that he always knows who to call to report things to.

While he looks forward to having more free time in retirement Franz said leaving the City of Lynnwood's staff is bittersweet.

team has won a number of awards and accolades during his tenure, for example several projects being recognized by the American Public Works Association (APWA), which he said are great to hang on the wall but to Franz, he said, the biggest trophy is seeing a "happy community" and seeing people use, and enjoy, the infrastructure.

The "ribbon of the package" of Franz's career, both figuratively and literally, was attending the ribbon-cutting event of the Sound Transit Link light rail extension where he was more than satisfied to see such a prodigious turnout but, more importantly, so many people use it daily.

"I know Lynnwood is going great place and it's in great hands," said Franz. "I can proudly prepare to leave."

Outside of work Franz enjoys playing jazz music with his son. As a lifelong trumpeter he has recently made the swap to stand up bass and informed the Lynnwood Times his upcoming retirement will grant him more time to devote to practicing.

Franz and his son play live music as a jazz duo every third Sunday at the Looking Glass Coffee in Snohomish beginning at noon.

In addition to his musical interest, Franz and his wife are looking forward to taking an upcoming trip either to England or Scandinavia to trace their ancestral lineage; Franz has ancestral roots in Finland and Sweden while his wife traced her ancestry back to Britain.

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Grocer Wars: Albertsons calls off merger, now suing Kroger for breach of agreement

By MARIO LOTMORE

BOISE, Idaho—A day after a federal judge blocked the \$25 billion merger of grocery giants Albertsons and Kroger, Albertsons files a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit against Kroger for breach of merger agreement.

The lawsuit filed in the Delaware Court of Chancery, is bringing claims for willful breach of contract and breach of the covenant of good faith and fair dealing alleging that Kroger failed to exercise “best efforts” and to take “any and all actions” to secure regulatory approval of the companies’ agreed merger transaction, as was required of Kroger under the terms of the merger agreement between the parties.

In a press release by Albertsons, it alleged that Kroger repeatedly refused to divest assets necessary for antitrust approval, ignored regulators’ feedback, rejected stronger divestiture buyers and failed to cooperate with its partner Albertsons.

“Rather than fulfill its contractual obligations to ensure that the merger succeeded, Kroger acted in its own financial self-interest, repeatedly providing insufficient divestiture proposals that ignored regulators’ concerns. Kroger’s self-serving conduct, taken at the expense of Albertsons and the agreed transaction, has harmed Albertsons’ shareholders, associates and consumers,” Tom Moriarty, Albertsons’ General Counsel and Chief Policy Officer, released in a statement. “We are disappointed that the opportunity to realize the significant benefits of the merger has been lost on account of Kroger’s willfully deficient approach to securing regulatory clearance.”

He added, “We are taking this action to enforce and preserve Albertsons’ rights and to protect the interests of our shareholders, associates and consumers. We believe strongly in the merits of our case and look forward to presenting it to the Court to hold Kroger responsible for the harm it has caused.”

In a statement released Wednesday, December 11, Kroger refuted these allegations and alleges that Albertsons “repeated intentional material breaches and interference throughout the merger process” which the company said will be proven in court.

“Albertsons’ claims are baseless and without merit,” Kroger wrote in its statement regarding the lawsuit. “Kroger refutes these allegations in the



Albertsons Store Boise, Idaho. SOURCE: Albertsons corporate website.

strongest possible terms, especially in light of Albertsons’ repeated intentional material breaches and interference throughout the merger process.

“This is clearly an attempt to deflect responsibility following Kroger’s written notification of Albertsons’ multiple breaches of the agreement, and to seek payment of the merger’s break fee, to which they are not entitled. Kroger looks forward to responding to these baseless claims in court.

“We went to extraordinary lengths to uphold the merger agreement throughout the entirety of the regulatory process and the facts will make that abundantly clear. We are incredibly proud of the Kroger team for how they worked through the merger process with the highest degree of integrity and commitment.

“We are confident in Kroger’s value creation model to drive sustainable growth. Kroger’s Board of Directors is currently evaluating next steps that serve the best interests of Kroger’s customers and associates and create value for shareholders.”

King County Superior Court Judge Marshall Ferguson ruled on December 10 that the proposed merger of grocery giants Kroger and Albertsons is unlawful and cannot go forward. The decision came following a September trial in Attorney General Bob Ferguson’s antitrust case challenging the merger. Earlier on that same day, Oregon U.S.

District Judge Adrienne Nelson issued a temporary injunction ruling that the \$24.6 billion Kroger-Albertsons merger would limit competition and harm consumers.

Judge Nelson said that supermarkets Kroger and Albertsons are “distinct from other grocery retailers” and are not direct competitors to Walmart, Amazon and other companies who sell non-grocery goods.

“The overarching goals of antitrust law are not met,” Judge Nelson wrote in the decision.

Albertsons alleges that the courts’ rulings could have been avoided if it weren’t “for Kroger’s breaching conduct.”

Albertsons is seeking billions of dollars in damages from Kroger to make Albertsons and its shareholders whole. Albertsons’ shareholders have been denied the multi-billion-dollar premium that Kroger agreed to pay for Albertsons’ shares and have been subjected to a decrease in shareholder value on account of Albertsons’ inability to pursue other business opportunities as it sought approval for the transaction. Albertsons also seeks to recover for the time, energy and resources it invested in good faith to try to make the merger a success.

Albertsons notified Kroger of its decision to terminate the merger which entitles Albertsons to an immediate \$600

million termination fee, according to the grocer.

In addition to the \$600 million termination fee, Albertsons says it is entitled to relief reflecting “the multiple years and hundreds of millions of dollars it devoted to obtaining approval for the merger, along with the extended period of unnecessary limbo Albertsons endured as a result of Kroger’s actions.”

Kroger and Albertsons are the two largest supermarket chains in Washington and the second and fourth largest supermarket operators in the country. More than half of all supermarkets in Washington state are currently owned by either Kroger or Albertsons, and they account for more than 50% of all supermarket sales in the state. Albertsons owns Safeway and Haggen, while Kroger owns QFC and Fred Meyer.

Collectively, Kroger and Albertsons operate more than 300 supermarkets in Washington, including approximately 194 in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area. They currently have more than 700,000 employees in nearly 5,000 stores across 49 states. They have combined annual revenue in excess of \$200 billion.

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T&T Supermarket set to open new store in Lynnwood for the summer of 2025

By MARIO LOTMORE

LYNNWOOD—Thousands attended the Grand Opening of the first T&T Supermarket in the U.S. located in the Factoria neighborhood of Bellevue. The line to enter the store wrapped around the 76,000-square-foot location offering “an unrivaled assortment of authentic Asian products, fresh produce, live seafood, an in-store Kitchen and Bakery, and Asian beauty products.”

Before becoming the location for T&T’s flagship US store in Bellevue, a Walmart Supercenter that closed its doors on April 22, 2022, occupied that space. T&T’s West Coast expansion will continue with a new store opening summer of 2025 at the Lynnwood Crossroads Shopping Center and in California at Westgate Center in San Jose in the fall of 2025.

“We never stopped looking at locations in Washington after the announcement of our flagship store in Bellevue,” said Tina Lee, CEO of T&T Supermarkets. “There’s excellent growth potential here, and although we originally planned on only committing to a second location after Bellevue opens, we just couldn’t resist this opportunity. It’s a great location in a former grocery box – at 30,000 square feet, it’s a fitting size for Lynnwood.”

The Lynnwood store will occupy the former Sprouts Farmers Market loca-



Lynnwood clinches T&T’s second location at the Lynnwood Crossroads Shopping Center that will serve the Puget Sound in summer of 2025. SOURCE: T&T Supermarket.

tion which closed its doors on April 30, 2024.

T&T Supermarket is the largest Asian supermarket chain in Canada, operating over 37 stores across Canada and the United States. The stores are in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and the state of Washington. T&T Supermarket was founded by Cindy and Jack Lee in Vancouver in 1993 and is named after their two daughters, Tina & Tiffany.

T&T Supermarket is headquartered in Richmond, BC, with offices in Toronto and Los Angeles and is now led by second generation successor and CEO,

Tina Lee.

New to its US stores is its selection of over 750 types of wine and spirits, specializing in Korean soju and Japanese sake.

T&T is known for its Asian bakery where one can find over 150 varieties of freshly baked bread and 50+ desserts and pastries, including viral treats like Napoleon Portuguese Egg Tarts, Mango Pomelo Swiss Rolls, Lava Mochi Puffs and various Asian desserts.

At T&T Supermarkets, customers can find the freshest Asian specialty meats, fruits and vegetables. From luxurious

Japanese Wagyu beef to sweet and crunchy Korean shine muscat grapes, succulent Southeast Asian lychees and nutritious Chinese greens. T&T works closely with local farmers to develop Asian specialty produce to provide customers with “high-quality, wholesome food.”

The T&T Kitchen offers ready-to-eat Asian-style dishes, from Cantonese-style BBQ to sushi, appetizers, breakfast items, dim sum, Peking duck, and papa crispy chicken to name a few. The T&T Kitchen also helps customers celebrate Asian holidays by showcasing traditional festive set menus.

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After layoffs, low pay, and unrealistic story quotas, Everett Herald reporters are striking back

By KIENAN BRISCOE

EVERETT—Reporters working for The Everett Daily Herald, the oldest still-functioning Snohomish County-based newspaper, have hit their limit after new management slashed half of its newsroom last summer while continuing to pay less than a livable wage and expecting unrealistic story quotas from its staff.

Now the Everett NewsGuild, a unionized group of Everett Herald Reporters, are calling on the public's support to write letters to the media outlet's new ownership, Carpenter Media Group, urging them for higher pay and more lenient quotas – which the union says incentivizes “stenography over real journalism.”

The Everett Herald staff unionized after an unanimous decision in 2022. After Carpenter Media's layoffs the union went on strike for two days.

Herald staff writers originally wrote a story about the strike but the article was immediately removed from publication by management, suppressing the public's access to information.

Carpenter Media owns more than 100 papers in the U.S. and has a reputation of laying off newsroom staff after acquiring various media outlets. The company recently acquired nearly a dozen Oregon publications under Pamplin Media group, the largest media company in the Portland metro area, before beginning similar layoffs over the summer.

According to the NewsGuild, Carpenter Media Group's latest proposed wage minimum was set at \$20.50 per hour – or about \$42,640 a year – which falls well below the MIT living wage calculations of \$61,500 for a single person with no kids living in Snohomish County.

The demands of the Everett NewsGuild are for fair wages, no connection between wages and quotas, a renegotiated time-off and paid sick leave system, severance packages in the event of potential future layoffs, and protections from contracting work out to non-union members. There are currently seven Herald employees represented by the Everett NewsGuild.

“Tying wages to ridiculous story quotas



Everett NewsGuild on strike. Photo credit: Everett NewsGuild

punishes journalists for failing to meet arbitrary requirements. Harsh quotas incentivize stenography over real journalism. Herald readers want meaningful coverage, not bylines at any cost,” the union wrote in a press release issued Friday.

The union announced on Friday, December 6, that it will be rejecting this proposal while asking supporters to submit letters to the editor to the Herald before its next bargaining session on Wednesday, December 11.

Since the Daily Herald lost half of its newsroom last summer staff has been reduced to only two Editors, four full-time Reporters, and one Photographer in addition to its sports and opinion staff. Still, Reporters are expected to meet the same demanding quotas as before, the union says, with Reporters either writing two to three stories a day or risk losing a promised \$1 an hour raise.

“This would essentially spam the front page of the Herald website with worthless content while good stories go untold,” said Jordan Hansen, a Herald reporter and Everett NewsGuild member. “Management has little respect for the work its newsroom actually does and this only serves to drive that point home. I question how this stands alongside ethical journalism and I’m not sure it can.”

Back in June Hansen criticized the Her-

ald's new ownership as having “insane and evil” business practices.

The Everett Herald, founded in 1901, is the longest still-standing newspaper focused on Snohomish County news. It falls within the umbrella of Sound Publishing which owns and operates 43 total media outlets in Washington and Alaska.

“Quality local journalism is more important than ever as the number of news outlets across Washington continues to shrink. The state has lost 20% of its newspapers since 2004, according to a 2022 report from the League of Women Voters of Washington. Sen. Maria Cantwell's office reported in 2020 that Washington newsrooms lost 67% of their workers from 2005 to 2020, a higher share than the 59% loss nationally,” the Everett NewsGuild wrote in a press release Friday.

In 2024, analysts and economists have pointed to a trend of journalist layoffs, and post-COVID flux combined with social media's dominant market share have given the news industry overall a reputational sense of riskiness. But where individuals see uncertainty, corporations may see opportunity.

Supporters can send letters to letters@herald.com.

What happened to the Herald's debt and its workers' pensions?

When the daily Herald was acquired by Carpenter Media Group court documents indicate that the family owners of Black Press walked away debt-free despite owing approximately \$6 million (Canadian) for one or more loans by undisclosed parties represented by Canso Investment Counsel and Deans Knight, the Seattle Post Alley first reported.

As part of that deal Canso and Deans forgave the \$6 million loan in exchange for the ownership of Black Press properties as well as assuming all other outstanding debts. Canso issued a new loan of about \$11.5 million (Canadian) to cover legal and other expenses incurred during the weeks it took to finalize the deal. In total the deal totaled slightly under \$13 million U.S. dollars.

Carpenter Media is a minority partner of Canso and was agreed to be the operator and public facing owner of the Herald.

Black Press had about a \$45 million pension obligation at the time of the deal which has since been wiped clean with Black Press paying only \$2 million to the federal agency now responsible for the pension fund, the Post Alley reported. That the pension was a major reason why Black Press sought creditor protection and needed to sell.

In January Black Press' Hawaii subsidiary was hit by a ransomware attack that also contributed to the rising cost of the deal. The cyber attack, court documents state, impacted HP Hawaii's ability to issue invoices to advertisers and subscribers adversely affecting the media outlet's cashflow of about \$200,000 per day.

The effects of this cyber-attack, which is estimated to have cost between \$300,000 and \$750,000 USD are among the \$11.5 million (Canadian) bridge loan by Canso.

About the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild

The Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild (TNG-CWA Local #37082) represents more than 250 workers in Washington, Idaho and Alaska, united in the belief that strong jobs preserve strong journalism in the Northwest. Find more at pnwguild.org.

from page 1 STATE BUDGET

- million to maintain the nation's most generous financial aid program, Washington College Grant.
- Clean energy transition: \$982 million of funding from the Climate Commitment Act continues popular and emission-reducing programs such as Washington's EV rebate program, cost-saving weatherization improvements, electric school buses, hybrid-electric ferries, and free transit for youth.
- Retention and recruitment: Most Washington state employees will receive small cost-of-living adjustments of 3% in 2025 and 2% in 2026. The consumer price index—a measure of inflation—increased 3.0% in the Seattle area over the past year.
- Transportation: Sustained funding

for new ferries and improved ferry service, and increased funding for fish barrier removal projects to meet the state's legal responsibilities. Climate Commitment Act funding allows for additional bike and pedestrian projects and more transit services across the state. A funding gap for highway projects will require legislators to explore options to adjust delivery timelines or funding.

- Inslee said Tuesday that his proposed budget imbeds the values of Washingtonians while still moving forward in progress the state has made over the last several years.

In previous years prior to Governor Inslee's seat, Washington State budgets required major reductions in spending and investment decisions, but the Governor said Tuesday that today the state's econ-

omy is not in recession.

“It's doing as well as ever. Several years ago, the state made extraordinarily difficult budget decisions as they grappled with budget gaps in the neighborhood of nine billion dollars,” said Inslee. “When I was sworn in in 2013 legislators had reduced spending by eleven billion dollars and they did things that leaders would sometimes do, especially during times of recession; they froze unnecessary hiring and travel, they consolidated or eliminated some agencies or functions, and they directed agencies to reduce fuel consumption. But that didn't add up to eleven billion dollars.”

At that time, before Inslee stepped in as governor, the legislature suspended two voter-approved education initiatives to reduce class sizes and increase teacher pay. They also took away state health-

care from 40,000 low-income Washingtonians, Inslee added, while cutting funds to universities and colleges that caused tuitions to soar, slashing mental health care services at state hospitals, reduced safety net programs for elderly and with disabilities in poverty, and cut state workforce by 12%.

But now Washington State is faced with a greater budget shortfall than back in 2013—as much as \$16 billion over the next four years. Gov. Inslee announced Tuesday that he is proposing a “balanced budget” to address the shortfall, which he said is important for the fiscal integrity of the State of Washington.

As far as cuts, the Governor has already directed a freeze on non-essential hiring, contracts, and travel. His budget

The Boeing Company announces over 4,000 layoffs across the country

By MARIO LOTMORE

ARLINGTON, Va.—According to Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN) announcements throughout the country, compiled by the Lynnwood Times, The Boeing Company as of December 9, has announced 4,272 layoffs in 10 states with Washington, by far, having the largest job cuts.

The first WARN notifications appeared in Washington, Oregon, and South Carolina on November 15. This was shortly after tens of thousands of International Association of Machinists 751 & W24 union members returned to work on November 12, following approval of a historic agreement with Boeing on November 4, ending a 53-day strike that cost the aerospace juggernaut billions of dollars in lost revenue.

The breakdown of the 4,272 layoff notices are as follows:

- Washington: 2,595 (2,199 by Jan. 17, 2025, and 396 by Feb. 21, 2025)
- Missouri: 692 by Jan. 7, 2025
- South Carolina: 220 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Arizona: 184 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Alabama: 158 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Florida: 141 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Pennsylvania: 101 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Virginia: 68 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Colorado: 63 by Jan. 17, 2025
- Oregon: 50 by Jan. 17, 2025

The Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) announced on December 6 that a total of 660 its members comprised the nearly 4,000 Boeing employees to be laid off by mid-January.

To support those with notices, SPEEA stated that it will partner with the Washington State Labor Council and the state's Department of Employment Security to hold informational meetings on unemployment insurance benefits and services to help the impacted members find new jobs.

Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg's four-point plan to "stabilize the business" appears to be in full swing across the country, which included layoffs of approximately 17,000 employees or 10% of its workforce.

At its third-quarter 2024 earnings briefing on October 23, Ortberg shared the grim reality of the company's financial challenges ahead and his four-point plan to "restore Boeing to the leadership position that we all know and want."

Revenues for the quarter were \$17.8 billion, down \$300 million from the previous year. So far for the year, Boeing has reported a total of \$51.3 billion in revenues, down from \$55.8 billion in third quarter 2023. For the year, the company is reporting a Net Loss of \$8 billion with \$6.174 billion in the third quarter alone.

Ortberg's framework to restoring Boeing to prominence is akin to Dr. W. Edwards Deming approaches to effective business management:

1. Culture change
2. Stabilize the business.
3. Improve execution discipline on new platform commitments
4. Build a new future

In his October announcement, Ortberg also committed to a returned emphasis on core total quality management (TQM) principles to "prevent the festering of issues" and "identify, fix, and understand root cause[s]."

Earlier this year, the S&P Global and Moody's lowered the aircraft manufacturer's creditworthiness in April to BBB- (the firm's lowest grade), the FAA capped 737 Max production to 38 planes per month following the Alaska air incident in January, plagued by delays of its 777X production, and setbacks meeting mandated international "greener" emission standards for its 767 aircrafts, resulted in the company burning through billions of dollars well before September's strike.

Boeing hasn't reported a full-year profit since 2018, a year before two crashes of the 737 MAX jet that led to the grounding of the plane worldwide.

Last week, FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker met with Ortberg and toured Boeing's 737 plant in Renton, which has not yet resumed 737 MAX airplane production over a month since the strike officially ended on November 4. Whitaker did share with Reuters that he plans another meeting with Ortberg in January as the company ramps up production.

The Boeing Production System follows a lean methodology utilizing Just-in-Time, CONWIP, and Job Shop philoso-

phies. Because of this complexity, it will be several weeks before Boeing will be at steady-state—full production—of its 737, 767, 777/777X and military derivatives P-8 and KC-46A aircrafts, a Boeing spokesman told the Lynnwood Times.

For its ramp up plan, Boeing will continue to comply with its Safety Management System policies that include employee training and certifications. Airplanes that have been completed and certified will continue to be delivered from the Everett and Seattle delivery centers, as well as Boeing South Carolina.

Apply to serve on Lynnwood's Parks & Recreation Board

The City of Lynnwood is looking for a member of our community to join its Parks & Recreation Board. The Board serves as an advisory body and its duties include advising and making recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, staff and other Boards and Commissions in the City with regard to parks, open space and recreation services and programs for the City of Lynnwood and the City's urban growth area. The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department provides a comprehensive system of parks, open space and recreation facilities that serves the needs of residents and visitors of Lynnwood.

SCAN TO APPLY



Each advisory body member is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council to a specific position number and term, and serves without compensation.

Meetings are held on the first Wednesday each month. Hours are generally 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Robert's Rules of Order shall form the basis of the operation of the meetings.

Requirements:

No more than two member(s) of the board may be nonresidents, community stakeholder(s) of the City of Lynnwood.

There is a preference for city of Lynnwood residents over nonresident candidates. (Ord. 3410 § 6, 2021; Ord. 3248 § 2, 2017; Ord. 3150 § 4, 2015)

Board Responsibilities and Functions:

In order to function well, the Parks and Recreation Board of the City of Lynnwood expects its members to:

- Attend regular meetings and work sessions and actively participate in discussions and decision-making, while respecting the Board's time constraints and the rights of other Board members to be heard.
- Serve on committees as appointed.
- Appear before the City Council in support of Board resolutions and interests.
- Attend Parks and Recreation Department-sponsored events.
- Have a commitment to safeguard and represent the public interest in the overall purpose of all parks, recreation, leisure time, community development, and natural area preservation activities in the City of Lynnwood and its anticipated growth area.
- Develop a knowledge of the policies, procedures, and goals of the Board.
- Become individually knowledgeable about Parks and Recreation issues so that our collective advice as a Board is credible. This includes reading appropriate literature, visiting sites, talking with citizens, and other actions. To advise means to give an opinion, to inform, to counsel, and to recommend.
- Encourage citizen involvement at all levels.
- Generate ideas, such as for community awareness or outreach, projects, education, workshops, fundraising, or special events, in keeping with the overall plan, and without creating additional burdens for existing staff. Board members may speak as members of the Board but must not represent their own views or recommendations as those of the Board, unless the Board has officially voted to nominate them as a spokesperson for the Board on a specific topic.

To learn more about the Parks & Recreation Board and to apply, visit: lynnwoodwa.gov/Government/Boards-and-Commissions/Parks-Recreation-Board.

Apply for vacancies on boards and commissions in Mukilteo

The City of Mukilteo encourages residents to actively participate in shaping the future of our community by serving on one of the City's Boards, Commissions, or Committees. These volunteer roles play a vital part in the City's policy development process, providing ongoing input to the Mayor and City Council.

SCAN TO APPLY



Mukilteo's Boards and Commissions cover a wide range of topics, from historic preservation to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While some are required by state law, others are created by local ordinance or special appointments by the Mayor and Council to address specific needs. All positions, except for the Hearing Examiner, are voluntary and unpaid, but they provide an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the community.

Current Vacancies:

- Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (1 hotelier)
- Historic Preservation Commission (1)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission (2)
- Parks and Arts Commission (1)

Interested residents can complete the online Application for Boards and Commissions at any time. To learn more about each Board or Commission and the application process, visit <https://mukilteowa.gov/306/Boards-Commissions-Committees>.

from page 1 **WOLFE**

passion that she brought to this work and passion she has in everything and her concern for the environment,” Logan said.

Incoming Commissioner, Lynnwood Vice President Julieta Altamirano-Crosby who secured the Snohomish County PUD District 2 seat in November with 53 percent of the County vote, shared with the Lynnwood Times that it is going to be difficult to fill Wolfe’s shoes and truly appreciates her mentorship.

“She is my mentor who I admire a lot,” Altamirano-Crosby told the Lynnwood Times. “Rebecca is a knowledgeable, kind, and professional person. It is going to be difficult to fill her shoes. I am proud to be joining a respectful and professional board to serve.”

Commissioner Wolfe thanked the team of Snohomish PUD for their talents in guidance over the last six years she has served on the Board. She shared their combined accomplishments reflecting that now the groundwork is set to accomplish the utility’s strategic priorities.

“Toni keeps asking, ‘Why are you leaving?’,” Commissioner Wolfe said. “You have to make way for younger people like Julieta. She has much to offer; she is a bridge builder with other communities and has a long history of good work.”

Snohomish PUD is a consumer-owned utility that was created by the voters of Snohomish County in 1936 for the purpose of providing electricity and water service. The utility began providing electric service in 1949, when it purchased the electric distribution system operated by Puget Sound Power & Light Company in Snohomish County and on Camano Island.

The PUD is governed by a Board of

Continued **PAGE 11**



(Top) Commissioner Rebecca Wolfe reflecting on the last six years of her tenure on the PUD Board at a reception held in her honor on Tuesday, December 17, 2024. (Bottom) Commissioners Sid Logan and Rebecca Wolfe speaking to attendees.



from page 8 **STATE BUDGET**

proposal also includes roughly \$2 billion in reductions or delays over the next four years including closing the Mission Creek Center, closing three re-entry centers in Corrections, closing two RHC’s, delaying Board bonuses for educators, and pausing childcare eligibility expansion that would otherwise take place.

Inslee added that these cuts are “big” but “necessary” given the circumstances of the state’s budget. He is also proposing to merge the state’s left one and left two pension systems which would allow a one-time transfer of \$1 billion from the state’s general fund while still leaving a surplus in the left system.

Despite Inslee’s proposed \$2 billion in budget cuts, he stated Tuesday that anything more would direct the state backwards in its progress.

“This budget, I think, follows Abraham’s Lincoln’s admonition. He said ‘as our case is new so must we think anew’ and our case is new in the State of Washington. Our case is new in the sense that at a moment we have unparalleled wealth being created in our state, at a time when the economy is soaring, at a time when people have moved in by about one million people because of our good economy, it is still a time when we have thousands of people who are ill-clad, ill fed, and unhoused,” said Inslee. “I believe to address this new economy we need to think anew.”

Part of this “anew” thinking is propos-

ing to increase revenues to respond to this dynamic change in economy, Inslee continued.

The top priority of Inslee’s proposed budget was to protect the progress that Washington State has been making, through programs and services for working families and small businesses. This includes public safety, education and early learning, housing, and behavioral health.

“We need a budget that keeps us moving forward in our state, that puts working families first, and continues creating a fair tax system,” said Inslee. “We have one of the strongest economies in the country that has produced thousands of millionaires and billionaires. We have proposed what I would consider fairly modest tax on incomes of extraordinary amounts.”

Inslee was referencing a proposed new wealth tax in his budget which, he says, would generate approximately \$10.2 billion over the next four years but imposing a 1% tax on worldwide wealth that exceed \$100 million. This would affect about 300,000 Washingtonians.

Inslee noted that he is “fairly confident” that what he considers a “modest tax”, would not affect the living standards of anyone with over \$100 million in assets.

As of now Washington State’s tax system is still slightly below average in terms of the amount of revenue it generates. Low-income Washingtonians, even after the adoption of the Capital Gains tax, pay six times a greater share

of their income than the wealthiest residents according to Inslee.

The Governor’s proposed budget also includes a tax change on some businesses that he said would raise approximately \$2.6 billion (about a 10% increase to the existing rate). This tax would be on companies with an annual income exceeding \$1 million on certain tax categories.

Other areas the Governor is focusing on in his proposed budget is behavioral health, substance abuse, school technology and maintenance, childcare subsidies, funding police officers (including hiring more state troopers), transportation infrastructure, or clean energy transition.

Democrats applauded Gov. Inslee’s proposed budget Tuesday with Senator June Robinson (D-Everett) stating:

“The governor’s proposal serves as a strong starting point for our work in the Senate. We will carefully consider all options to close the shortfall, minimize disruptions to essential services, and ensure every Washingtonian — regardless of zip code or income — has access to opportunity, stability, and a better future. I’m confident that, through collaboration and focus, we will deliver a budget that puts people first and prepares us for the challenges of tomorrow.”

However, on the other end of the aisle some Republicans criticized the Governor’s budget, blaming the state’s deficit on overspending and saying the proposed budget goes against the Gover-

nor’s promise to not raise taxes.

“This budget is not a serious proposal. Governor Inslee’s \$13 billion tax hike and reckless spending increase show just how out of touch his administration is with the financial realities facing Washington families,” wrote Rep. Travis Couture (R-Allyn). “Our state has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. Despite record revenues over the past four years, Democratic leaders in the Legislature have consistently engaged in unsustainable budgeting by spending more revenue than was expected to be raised directly, causing this current deficit. No Washington family has the luxury of engaging in this level of fiscal irresponsibility.”

Now that the Governor’s proposed budget has been submitted it goes to lawmakers for their deliberation.

Washington State’s budget is separated into three different budgets: operating (schools and human services), capital (public buildings, parks, etc.), and transportation (roads, bridges, walkways, etc.).

Every fall the Office of Financial Management submits requests. The Governor then takes these requests and write a budget proposal which he submits the legislature in December. Once the legislative session opens up in January lawmakers will then hold hearings on the Governor’s proposals with the State’s finalized budget plan being finalized typically sometime around March.

from page 1 **LARSEN**

the last year, or so, but also a way to gauge what their concerns and values are directly.

In the wake of increasing threats of violence against Congressional leaders, from effigies left outside Rep. Larsen's Everett office in 2023 to recent bomb threats made against Congress around Thanksgiving of this year, Larsen stood by the importance of public engagement, albeit showing up to his event with increased security.

Rep. Larsen has just been selected to continue serving as the lead Democrat (or Ranking member) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for the upcoming Congress. Through this role, he said he will remain focused on building on important legislative wins like the FAA Reauthorization Act and the Water Resources Development Act, as well as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

"It is an honor to be selected to continue serving as Ranking Member of the T&I Committee. This Congress, I worked with my colleagues on T&I to implement bipartisan laws that create good-paying jobs and improve America's infrastructure," Ranking Member Larsen said. "I look forward to continuing this work in the next Congress alongside Chairman Graves and to passing bipartisan legislation that will keep people and the economy moving while creating safer, cleaner, greener and more accessible transportation."

At Sunday's event, which took place in the Edmonds Plaza Room from 1 p.m. until 2 p.m., Edmonds Mayor Mike Rosen opened with a few words about working with Larsen for several years on issues including the opioid crises, infrastructure and transportation, the environment, and much more.

"There is a lot to like about Rick, not just that we share the same hairstyle," Mayor Rosen joked. "One thing is that he shows up, he is here, and he listens, and he pays attention. He wants to be on-site, not just sitting in a room without windows and talk about things. He also understands that there are short-term issues and long-term issues that we have to be dealing with and he's working hard to make sure that there our jobs for people, and that everybody has access, and we cut down barriers so that everyone can participate in the government process."

Also in attendance Sunday was County Councilman and State Representative Strom Peterson, Rep. Cindy Ryu, Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin, Edmonds City Council President Vivian Olson, Edmonds City Council members Will Chen, and Susan Paine, Port of Edmonds Commissioner Selena Killin, Lynnwood Council President George Hurst, and Lynnwood City Councilman David Parshall.

In Larsen's last year in Congress he attended nearly 300 meetings, traveled 62,856 miles to and from Washington D.C. and the second Congressional Dis-

trict, introduced 17 bills, and co-sponsored 299 bills. Just some of the bills he had pass involve adding Mount Vernon as a District Court location in Washington, reauthorized the Neotropical Bird Conservation Act, passed the Federal Aviation Administration Authorization Act, and passed a bill to Mint commemorative coins to celebrate the soccer World Cup coming to Seattle in 2026.

As an avid sports enthusiast, and former ball boy for the original Seattle Sounders back in the day, Larsen said with the ability to mint coins and sell to collectors the money raised will be used to fund youth soccer programs in communities that otherwise would not have the opportunity to play.

A couple of years ago Larsen championed for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which President Joe Biden signed in November of 2021. There is still two years left remaining to this bill with approximately \$250 billion still left to fund transportation and infrastructure projects nationwide.

Larsen helped pass the Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act that same year.

Since the BIL became law more than \$386 million has been invested in transportation and infrastructure project just in Washington's second congressional district.

Projects in Snohomish County that have benefitted from these dollars include but are not limited to; \$25 million to construct a new six-lane multimodal bridge over Interstate 5 in Lynnwood, \$400,000 to the City of Everett to develop a supplemental Speed Management Plan, and a whopping \$341.4 million toward the Sound Transit Link light rail expansion to Lynnwood.

"Every day is infrastructure day here in Snohomish County," said Larsen. "You can't have a big league economy with little league infrastructure."

Larsen's priorities going into the 119th Congress will be working on lowering costs for healthcare and prescription drugs, combating the opioid crises and working with tribal leaders to be able to prosecute non-tribal drug dealers, and protecting the environment.

Though the opioid epidemic has run rampant through the state of Washington for several years it was exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Between February 2022 and February 2023, Washington State had the largest percentage increase in the United States with most overdose-related deaths being attributed to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. In 2022 more than 75% of all of Washington's drug-related overdoses were linked to opioids. While the United States witnessed a 3% decrease in overdose deaths during this period, deaths in Washington State increased 21%.

Going into the 119th Congress, which will take place from 2025 through 2026, Larsen said he suspects the biggest challenge with the Trump Administration will be their desire to provide tax cuts to the largest corporations and the wealth-

iest individuals while still needing to build out infrastructure and ensure senior citizens will have resources like Medicare. He worries that these tax cuts will interfere with the government's ability to provide essential services for citizens' overall quality of life.

This will be the closest majority that Congress has had since 1931 and in that congressional session the majority flipped three separate times. Larsen shared with the Lynnwood Times that he believes it will be difficult for Republicans to push their ideas passed the finish line, which will in turn, allow Democrats to fight for the things that are "helping the average American."

As for Washington state, Larsen said he's mostly looking forward to passing the next version of an infrastructure plan that would pave the way for the State's next generation of transportation and infrastructure projects — something he credits to bringing unemployment in Washington down to approximately 4.5%.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

During the public's opportunity to ask questions and address Rep. Larsen, the first question was critical of Larsen's defense of Israel in the Israeli/Palestine conflict, and his reaction to pro-Palestinian protesters who demonstrated at one of his campaigning events.

Larsen informed the constituent that he co-sponsored HR 9649, which would restore funding for UNRWA, a refugee agency which the UN runs, and is pressuring Israel to administer humanitarian aid to Gaza immediately, however the politics in the Middle East have since grown far more complex.

"The U.S. needs to continue to support humanitarian aid, supporting a peaceful resolution, supporting a ceasefire, to get the hostages back home," said Larsen.

As far as being challenged for "running away to the kitchen," as the commenter worded it, Larsen defended his action stating if he doesn't feel safe he's not sticking around, correcting her that he did not "run" but "peacefully walked,"

and said he has no apology for looking out for his own safety so that he could return safely to his family and enjoy the Seahawks.

Another question came from a concerned citizen regarding social security and Medicare for those of retirement age. Larsen reiterated that this issue is on his top priorities but, given the incoming administration, it could take a long time and effort. He added that he has the confidence of a strong vote which is "way more than the incoming President got."

Other questions and comments encompassed the rise in powerful storms, and subsequent power outages, the best way to get in touch with representatives of congress, border security, and so on.

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Commissioners, which is composed of three local citizens elected for their district on a nonpartisan basis by the people of Snohomish County and Camano Island. The commissioners establish PUD policies and rates, guide operations, and appoint the CEO/general manager to direct 1,079 employees in the day-to-day operation of the utility.

Snohomish PUD served an average 377,269 customers in 2023, making it the 12th largest consumer-owned utility in the United States and the second largest in the Pacific Northwest. It has an Electric System Operating Budget of \$788.9 million, a Generation System Operating Budget of \$15.5 million, and a Water System Operating Budget of \$18.6 million.

In 2023, the PUD sold 8.3 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity to its customers. Of that total, 47% of the electricity was consumed by residential customers, 29% by commercial customers, and 5% by industrial customers.

Snohomish County PUD last year invested \$13.4 million in direct funding of conservation programs; \$33.16 million in non-hydro renewable purchases; and \$19.9 million in needs-based assistance, including \$9.59 million in utility grants provided in partnership with the Washington State legislature.



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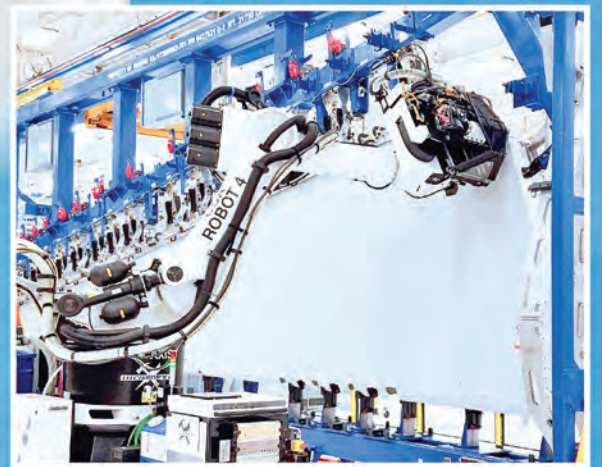
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