

January 10, 2021

Legislative session opens January 11

Prepared by Marie Sullivan, WSPTA Legislative Consultant, legconsultant@wastatepta.org

When the 67th legislature meets for business January 11, it may be the only day in this 105-day session when legislators are meeting in person, in Olympia, at the State Capitol. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on large gatherings, both House and Senate Democrats plan to conduct business using virtual platforms for committee meetings, caucus discussions, and even floor votes. On this second Monday of January, the House convenes at noon, and the Senate convenes at 2 PM, to adopt rules to allow a virtual session.

Making the start of session even harder are recent violent events both in Washington, DC and Olympia this past week, along with threats to occupy the state legislative building before the start of session. On Friday, Governor Jay Inslee activated 750 National Guard to join the Washington State Patrol and local law enforcement to keep Monday's proceedings from being disrupted. Also on Friday, temporary seven-foot-high chain link fencing was erected around much of the Capitol campus, closing the campus from midnight January 10 through midnight January 12.

Overshadowing the long session is a significant budget shortfall that lawmakers will need to fix in a second supplemental operating budget. Fiscal chairs have said their initial goal will be to "stop the bleeding," and focus on what budget changes need to be adopted in the first few weeks for the budget cycle that ends June 30, 2021. In his budget proposals released last December, Governor Jay Inslee balanced the current biennium by capturing some of the declines in K-12 education funding due to reduced student enrollment this school year and transportation funding formulas that heavily rely on buses transporting kids to school (and not the other way around). He also proposed using nearly \$1.8 billion from the state's Budget Stabilization Account for this biennium, and a capital gains tax for the 2021-23 biennium, both of which will require legislative action.

Fortunately, the economic revenue forecast has improved since the June forecast, although budget writers still say the outlook is uncertain and unpredictable. However, with vaccines starting to be rolled out in Washington state, lawmakers are hopeful revenue will continue to improve so that they won't need to make any cuts in the 2019-21 operating budget (and hope that approach holds true for the 2021-23 biennium too). The impact of the most recent federal stimulus package should also help fill one-time gaps while state revenue catches up. Most legislators don't see this as a year to fund activities that will cost significant amounts of new money although several tax and fee proposals are expected, some of which may be tied to dedicated expenditures (e.g., the Fair Start Act, an early learning/childcare proposal is considering a payroll tax).

As they always do, lawmakers gazed into the crystal ball with the Associated Press on January 7. The first hour has representatives from the four legislative caucuses, and the second hour includes a discussion with Governor Jay Inslee. The TVW video can be found [here](#). House and Senate Democrats have said they plan to keep the session agenda tight: addressing COVID, economic recovery, equity, climate change, and police accountability. House and Senate Republicans have expressed frustration with the Governor’s emergency proclamations and refused to extend the most recent ones; their emphasis will be to take early action to get businesses and Washington’s economy up and running.

What to expect this session

The main business of long sessions in “odd” calendar years is to adopt new two-year spending plans for operations, construction, and transportation. This session the next revenue forecast is in March, with legislative budgets for the 2021-23 biennium expected shortly thereafter. The early action will focus on the budgets that expire at the end of June.

Due to the virtual nature of the session, committees will allow remote testimony in both the House and Senate. Participating can be one of three ways: signing up to testify via remote connection; providing written testimony which will become part of the official record and be available to committee members; and stating a position (with no comments). To participate “live,” people will be allowed to sign up as soon as the bill has been scheduled for a public hearing; signups will close one hour prior to the committee hearing. Signing up does not guarantee testimony, but individuals will be sent a unique link to participate. Committee chairs will decide the order and length of the public hearing, as well as who will testify. Submitting written testimony through the portal is allowed up to 24 hours after the public hearing.

- Here are the [Senate remote portal](#) and the [House remote portal](#).
- All committee meetings will be televised by TVW and can be found on the day of at www.tvw.org or in the TVW archives.

Both chambers have released draft session planners for the 15-week session. The House has shaved 10 minutes off each committee meeting, while the Senate added 30 minutes between committee meetings. The structure looks like this:

Senate education meets Weeks 1-6, and Weeks 9, 10, 11 on:

- Mondays, 1:30-3:30 PM
- Wednesdays, 10:30 AM-12:30 PM
- Fridays, 8-10 AM

Senate Ways & Means meets Weeks 1-6, and Weeks 9-12 on:

- Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 4-6 PM

House education meets Weeks 1-6, and Weeks 9, 10, 11 on:

- Tuesdays, 8-9:45 AM
- Thursdays, 1:30-3:15 PM
- Fridays, 10 AM – 11:45 AM

House Appropriations meets Weeks 1-6, and Weeks 9-12 on:

- Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays at 3:30-5:15 PM

As always, along the way there will be deadlines for bills to pass out of policy and fiscal committees, out of Rules, and off the floor. Lawmakers plan to spend Wednesday and Friday afternoons meeting in their respective caucuses and conducting session, starting Week 1. The 2021 session is scheduled to end April 25.

Because this was an election year and there is turnover in both chambers, official rosters haven't been posted yet. Next week's report will have a list of the new rosters, committees and committee members, and House and Senate leadership. However, committee chairs for the House and Senate budget and education committees from the 2020 session haven't changed. Sen. Lynda Wilson of Clark County is the new lead Republican on Senate Ways & Means and Rep. Mike Steele of Chelan is the new lead Republican on House Capital Budget.

WSPTA Legislative Priorities (all bills may be accessed [here](#))

Washington State PTA adopts a [two-year platform](#). Delegates at the 2020 Legislative Assembly adopted five issues as the highest priority issues, and other adopted positions are listed as "Also Supported." The WSPTA Advocacy Committee is developing videos and one-pagers for members' use in advocacy efforts this session.

Look for bills and committee hearings that relate to the Top 5 and WSPTA's "Also Supported Positions" in the *Week Ahead* section and Bill Tracking List.

The Week Ahead

(Schedule subject to change, all bills can be founded through this [link](#))

Monday, January 11 – no hearings

Tuesday, January 12

Public Safety (House) - Virtual, - 1/12 @ 8:00am

- HB 1054 - Public Hearing - Establishing requirements for tactics and equipment used by peace officers. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Ways & Means (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/12 @ 4:00pm

- SB 5083 - Public Hearing - Concerning the capital budget. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- SB 5084 - Public Hearing - Concerning state general obligation bonds and related accounts. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- SB 5091 - Public Hearing - Making 2019-2021 fiscal biennium second supplemental operating appropriations. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- SB 5092 - Public Hearing - Making 2021-2023 fiscal biennium operating appropriations. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Wednesday, January 13

Early Learning & K-12 Education (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/13 @ 10:30am

- SB 5030 - Public Hearing - Developing comprehensive school counseling programs. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- SB 5044 - Public Hearing - Concerning professional learning, equity, cultural competency, and dismantling institutional racism in the public school system. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Thursday, January 14

Capital Budget (House) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 8:00am

- HB 1080 - Public Hearing - Concerning the capital budget. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- HB 1081 - Public Hearing - Concerning state general obligation bonds and related accounts. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Labor, Commerce & Tribal Affairs (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 8:00am

- SB 5134 - Public Hearing - Enhancing public trust and confidence in law enforcement and strengthening law enforcement accountability for general authority Washington peace officers, excluding department of fish and wildlife officers. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Environment & Energy (House) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 1:30pm

- HB 1091 - Public Hearing - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the carbon intensity of transportation fuel. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Public Safety (House) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 1:30pm

- HB 1092 - Public Hearing - Concerning law enforcement data collection. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Appropriations (House) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 3:30pm

- HB 1093 - Public Hearing - Making 2019-2021 fiscal biennium second supplemental operating appropriations. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)
- HB 1094 - Public Hearing - Making 2021-2023 fiscal biennium operating appropriations. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Ways & Means (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/14 @ 4:00pm

- SB 5096 - Public Hearing - Concerning an excise tax on gains from the sale or exchange of certain capital assets. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Friday, January 15

Early Learning & K-12 Education (Senate) - Virtual, - 1/15 @ 8:00am

- SB 5128 - Public Hearing - Concerning student transportation funding during a local, state, or national emergency. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)

Environment & Energy (House) - Virtual, - 1/15 @ 10:00am

- HB 1050 - Public Hearing - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fluorinated gases. (Remote testimony.) (If measure is referred to committee.)