

# A Peek Forward on the Political Front

by Donna Christensen, WACCRA Lobbyist

The Washington State Legislature starts its work on the second half of the biennial legislative session this month. The first session completed its work in June of 2023. That session is the longer of the two sessions; this second session is not as long and deals with fewer new bills. Instead, it focuses primarily on the 2023-2025 biennial budget changes. 2024 is also a significant year for elections in Washington State as noted below.

The second half session of the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislature will begin on Monday, January 8, 2024, and is scheduled to end on March 7, 2024. The 60-day session happens each even-numbered year and allows legislators to work on supplemental budgets – making changes in the second year of the biennial budget to funds allocated in the 2023-2025 operating, capital, and transportation budgets. Legislation introduced in 2023 but not adopted may be considered in the 2024 session, as well as any new bills introduced.

Legislators have asked advocates to plan for fewer new bills this session. The areas that are of most concern are public safety, homelessness/housing, and cost-of-living increases. Cities and counties are organizing to ask the Legislature to increase their capacity to raise revenue. They will also pursue funding to deal with issues such as public safety, mental illness, and substance use disorder.

Governor Jay Inslee released his budget proposals after the positive November revenue forecast. His budget calls for increases in funding to help cover costs related to rising caseload forecasts and inflations. The Governor has announced he will not run for re-election in 2024.

2024 is an election year. All seats in the state House, which currently has 58 Democrat and 40 Republican members, will be on the November ballot. Half the Senate seats will be on the ballot, too. There are

currently 29 Democrats and 20 Republicans in the Senate. Any resignations could impact those numbers and several representatives are expected to retire. All state-wide officials will also be on the ballot including the Governor, the Attorney General and the Insurance Commissioner, all of whom have announced they will not seek re-election for their current offices.

In the United States Congress, Senator Maria Cantwell will be up for re-election as well as nine members of the Washington State congressional delegation. There is one open congressional seat.

The new year holds a number of opportunities for WACCRA to continue to build understanding of WACCRA's goals with legislators and regulators, both existing and new. Member engagement with politicians will be important in 2024 so stay tuned.