A short, sometimes sweet session

Apprenticeship, transportation, COLAs among highlights

By JOE KENDO

Short legislative sessions like 2022’s are a 60-day sprint to pass bills and agree on budgets. The time pressures alone are not conducive to big bills, or achieving large-scale budget wins. But this year held some surprises—particularly with respect to budget priorities and job creating investments—aided in large part by significant federal resources and higher than anticipated state revenue. Policy accomplishments were more muted, though many labor priorities were adopted. There’s much for Washington’s labor movement to be proud of, despite a handful of missed opportunities that the House and the Senate should have advanced.

In many ways, workforce development was elevated in 2022 as a priority for lawmakers, both in terms of job quality and worker education. This included the passage of two labor priority bills in support of apprenticeship. SB 5600 (Kelier) creates platforms at Labor and Industries for unions and employer groups to establish and expand apprenticeship programs. SB 5764 (Randall) eases access to the Washington College Grant for apprentices and promotes recognition of their learning when they seek academic credit for their experience. (See Page 3 story for more details on both.)

Critical frontline state employees also had their pandemic sacrifices recognized with the funding of several mid-contract cost-of-living adjustments. Amid COVID-related budget uncertainty, social workers, correctional officers, road maintenance employees, nurses, college instructors, safety inspectors and other frontline public employees went without raises last year. As the state’s economic and revenue outlook improved, their unions negotiated for substantial cost-of-living adjustments, coupled with job-class specific raises to improve agencies’ ability to recruit and retain our quality, dedicated public workforce. (See Page 8 story for details.)

Tax-break accountability advanced this year as the inclusion of strong labor standards became the norm

Some key wins in 2022 for all of Washington

Washington is an amazing place to live and work. Our state has one of the nation’s strongest labor movements, and that’s why we also have some of the best standards and protections for workers. We’re also ranked as one of the best states to do business and our healthy economy is the envy of most other states. But that strength and growth is uneven.

Some communities, particularly in the most populated urban areas of the Puget Sound region, have experienced explosive growth (and the housing shortages and other challenges that creates). But others, particularly in rural areas have not seen the same level of job creation and economic activity. That’s why one of my priorities during my term as President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO has been to promote rural economic development.

I’m pleased to report that major progress was made on that front during the 2022 legislative session.

It starts with the bold transportation package approved by Democratic legislators on the session’s final day. The Move Ahead Washington package—nearly $17 billion in transportation investments over 16 years—was supported by labor, business and environmental interests. That money will be used to leverage additional federal resources from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by Congress last year. This will absolutely put folks to work in every corner of the state. This will create jobs maintaining and preserving current infrastructure, building key projects, improving transit

Legislative staffers got sick of being denied bargaining rights

In recent years, the Legislature has granted collective bargaining rights to more and more groups of Washington state employees, whose bargaining rights are established under state law. But they haven’t done so for the people who run the Legislature itself: the legislative aides, security, nonpartisan staff, and caucus staffs.

HB 1806, sponsored by Rep. Marcus Riccelli (D-Spokane), would have finally granted them freedom to choose whether they want to join together in unions and bargain for better wages and working conditions. After the bill failed to get a House vote before the cutoff deadline, more than 100 legislative branch employees held a sickout on Feb. 16 to express their profound disappointment. Ethics standards prohibit staff from lobbying members—even on bills pertaining directly to their rights and working conditions—so these brave workers...
Each session, we fight for better working conditions, expanded rights, and greater protections for working people in Washington. Policy making is one of the powerful tools the labor movement uses to organize for rising people and build thriving communities for us all.

This session, we fought for the priorities of essential workers who have shown up for us throughout these pandemic years. We know that gains in these areas have cascading positive effects in our communities. After all, working people are the cornerstone of our communities, and when we win big for working people, we lift up all Washingtonians.

Good schools are fundamental for thriving communities, which is why HB 1664 (Raley)—which increases the allocation of resources for nurses, social workers, psychologists and counselors in our schools—is so important. It focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of students and ensures that trained professionals can supplement the support students get in the classroom.

With HB 1701 (Bergquist), we won improved retirement benefits for public employees like firefighters who regularly risk their lives on the job. These improvements, passed unanimously, will help ensure the dignified retirement these workers have earned protecting our communities. With SB 5847 (Llias), more public employees will have the opportunity to access the potentially life-changing federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Public employees provide essential services, and in the Legislature, these employees work long hours supporting the democratic process that provides us with the opportunity to win gains for workers. But legislative employees are barred from exercising collective bargaining rights, unlike other public workers. HB 2124 (Riccelli) opens the door to ensuring legislative employees have the basic American right to join together and bargain. To the 61 Republicans that voted against this bill, shame on you for failing to support the workers without whom you could not do your job.

These policies are real gains that benefit real folks. We’re proud of this work, and the partnerships we’ve built with elected officials and community groups to get it done. But the reality is that some meaningful, important legislation was left on the cutting floor this year.

SB 5326 (Robinson) would have required healthcare and retirement benefits for private drivers on par with publicly employed school bus drivers. HB 1837 (Bronске) would have allowed the state Department of Labor and Industries to issue rules to address preventable but debilitating repetitive stress injuries developed on the job. Unfortunately, both bills failed to advance out of their house of origin.

We’re coming back for these wins in the 2023 session. Working people put their bodies on the line and will continue to fight for the working conditions and compensation we deserve. This year, we’ll see key elections statewide. We’re ready to build on this year’s policy gains and ensure labor champions are elected to fight for us next session, and beyond.

WSLC seeks gains for essential workers

and ensuring other mobility options for workers as they begin returning to their workplaces. Importantly, this package does not raise gas taxes—something that has been on the table as gas prices have skyrocketed due to pandemic-related supply chain issues and oil companies seeking to maximize profits.

Moving Ahead Washington was approved essentially on party lines with Democrats in support and Republicans opposed. GOP legislators take the easy approach by opposing bills, while Republicans see the need to work with Democrats to find common ground.

Move Ahead Washington was approved in both chambers by Rep. April Berg (D-Kent) and Rep. Marcus Riccelli (D-Seattle) and signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee. It needs to be passed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee.

It includes $5 billion of resources, including $3 billion in new resources for transportation. It will advance three major projects:

- $1.2 billion for a large-scale multimodal project to connect Amtrak’s Cascades Service with Sound Transit’s Link light rail in Lynnwood.
- $930 million to continue construction of the high-speed rail line between Seattle and Portland.
- $2.8 billion to continue construction of the high-speed rail line between Tacoma and Portland.

Importantly, this package provides for interest arbitration due to the employer’s refusal to bargain.

The WSLC was also pleased that the Legislature approved tax incentives that will create jobs in the construction of schools in the state. Both HB 1804 (D-Merlot) and SB 2124 (D-Bremerton) will ensure that apprentices have access to a broad suite of student support services, as well as greater academic acknowledgement of their education and training.

The WSLC was also pleased that the Legislature approved tax incentives that will create jobs in the construction of data centers in central and eastern Washington (HB 1846 by Rep. April Berg) and statewide in the film industry (HB 1914 by Rep. Marcus Riccelli). Over the years, labor has always been a fan of tax incentives. I can tell you from personal experience that poorly drafted ones—like Boeing’s epic 787 tax incentives—don’t necessarily create jobs. But the ones we approved in this year’s session are models for how tax incentives should be written to guarantee the promise of good jobs.

At the governor’s request, the Legislature also approved an important budget proviso that could help reverse thousands of jobs at the Fenoldrical area, including the Q40 and Intalco aluminum smelters. That plant shut down in 2020 and those jobs disappeared, but it was our working alongside the leadership of Sen. Carlyle (D-Helmle) and Rep. Munk, the state approved $10 million for upgrading and modernizing the smelting process at that facility to reduce emissions. This will help restore these aluminum smelters to the West Coast. The final hurdle is a power agreement from the Bonneville Power Administration, and we’re continuing to work on that.

There are lots of other important labor-supported bills approved in 2022 that will spread the economic benefit throughout the state. They include streamlining the siting and permitting for energy facilities, prevailing wages for workers with disabilities, union-negotiated raises for public employees, pension improvements for retired public employees, and much more.

As you’ll read in this Legislative Report, we got key wins for the working people. One notable priority that failed to pass was safe staffing standards for healthcare facilities. The WSLC will join the Washington State Nurses Association, SEIU 1199NW and UFCW 3000 in coming years to press for those standards in the future.

I urge all WSLC-affiliated unions to be active participants in the WSLC’s Campaign for the 2024 election—specifically the 2024 WA State legislature and the 2024 WA State Senate. This is the time to build on our successes and to push for legislation that will help working people and their families.

Thank you for everything you do to support Washington’s working families.

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Apprenticeship gets a big boost in 2022

One of the priority issues on the 2022 legislative agenda of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO was expanding apprenticeship opportunities so more people can “earn while they learn” and pursue family-wage careers.

Significant progress was made on that front with the passage of SB 5600 sponsored by Sen. Karen Keisler (D-Des Moines) and SB 5764 by Sen. Emily Randall (D-Bremerton). Both bills were signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee on March 24.

SB 5600 will expand apprenticeships across the board. Building on work done by the building trades, as well as the new state initiative Career Connect Washington, it will expand capacity and opportunity for current state-registered apprenticeship programs, and allow for expanded access to training and educational opportunities.

“Many have built their educational and career journeys with our nation-leading apprenticeship programs,” Randall said. “We can do a better job of recognizing and honoring their many hours of on-the-job learning they’ve invested, and make sure they get credit for that if they want to pivot and grow in their careers.”

As a result of these bills’ passage, workers in Washington state will benefit from new apprenticeship programs in growing fields, reinvigorated support for existing apprenticeships, and significant state-funded training for apprentices at public colleges.

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Another legislative priority for Washington’s labor movement in 2022 was to promote clean energy production by reforming the state’s siting and permitting process for new energy facilities. In recent years, the Legislature has passed a series of laws to reduce the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by mandating a transition to carbon-free energy production, capping and pricing carbon emissions, and requiring low-carbon transportation fuels. But the infrastructure necessary to achieve the policies is sorely lacking. That’s because the siting and permitting process for new energy facilities, and the manufacturing supply chain necessary to build those facilities, often stymies their construction.

Sponsored by Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon (D-Seattle), HB 1812 will improve and expand state siting and permitting processes to speed the development of this critical infrastructure, while preserving the protective nature of our environmental regulations and ensuring tribal governments and community stakeholders are respected.

The bill establishes the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council as a standalone agency so it is adequately funded to process more project proposals; reduces uncertainty by defining issues before adjudication processes begin; provides pre-application assistance to potential applicants; and includes timely outreach to tribes, government agencies and community stakeholders to identify potential challenges or missing information before an application is submitted.

The bill passed the House 95-3 (Vote #2) and the Senate 29-20 (Vote #5). Gov. Jay Inslee partially vetoed sections regarding a stakeholder study that was not funded in the current budget, but the substance of the bill remains intact and is now law.

The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO believes these reforms will not only promote clean-energy production in Washington, they could attract manufacturing facilities that build industrial-scale batteries, electric and clean fuel vehicles, and the carbon-free electricity storage necessary to make a clean grid responsive to consumer demand. HB 1812 accomplishes all this while creating more job opportunities for workers in construction and manufacturing.

Prevailing wages: One success, one disappointment

Two good prevailing wage bills supported by the labor movement were considered this year, though only one made it to the governor’s desk.

SB 5763 (Randall) ends the waiver of the state’s prevailing wage standards for construction and service workers with disabilities. This follows another Sen. Randall bill in 2021, which is phasing out similar waivers for the minimum wage. The Department of Labor and Industries has only issued one prevailing wage waiver since 2013, which are most commonly used for custodial service contractors. SB 5763, which passed with strong bipartisan support (see Senate Vote #5 and House Vote #6), better aligns state law with the notion that all work has dignity, and that there should be dignity for all workers.

Disappointingly, HB 1776 (Sells) did not advance from the House this year. It would have restored a policy originally included in 2019’s HB 1817 (Sells), which set training and wage standards for high hazard facilities like refineries.

On the Senate floor, HB 1817 was amended to replace prevailing wage with another less elegant and less protective wage standard that has caused confusion and inconsistency since its implementation. This year’s effort to restore the prevailing wage policy surprisingly fell short despite the House having endorsed it three years earlier.

In recent years, prevailing wage standards have been normalized as an accountability measure in tax policy with their inclusion in the Clean Energy Transformation Act and this year’s tax preferences for data centers, the film industry and clean technology manufacturing facilities. It is disappointing that the Legislature failed to pass HB 1776. Prevailing wages ensure that workers are paid commensurate with area standards. That supports quality middle-class jobs throughout Washington.

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Bill to clarify electrical certification stalls in House

SB 5599, sponsored by Sen. Rebecca Saldana (D-Seattle) and supported by the IBEW and WSLEC, set out to clarify state law around certification requirements for electricians.

It provided a technical fix to a bipartisan bill passed in 2018. Under SB 5599, people who have completed a journey-level apprenticeship program (which will be required as of July 2023), but who have equivalent training and experience, will be able to take an exam to obtain journey-level electrician certification if they have good cause for not completing the minimum hours of work. It also clarified the requirements for applying out-of-state hours and experience in the military towards certification.

SB 5599 passed the Senate 29-20, but got bogged down in the House and never received a floor vote.
Get ready for Labor Neighbor

By CHERIKA CARTER

This Legislative Report is full of stories about the importance of electing pro-worker lawmakers. This year in both Olympia and Washington, D.C., they made job-creating infrastructure investments, boosted apprenticeship, and bolstered pensions.

But clearly there is more to be done. Priorities in this Washington like hospital safe staffing, and in that Washington like PRO Act labor law reform are just a few votes from becoming reality.

That’s why the 2022 elections will be critical in determining whether we keep making progress building worker power or if we suffer setbacks. We need to work as hard as ever to ensure that champions of working families get elected to public office.

In our state, we are fortunate to have many champions who are incumbent and need our support for re-election. But there are also an unusually high number of open state legislative seats in 2022.

Labor Neighbor, the WSLC grassroots member-to-member political education program, will once again be leafletting, calling and mailing union families once again be leafletting, calling and mailing union families regarding incumbent and new candidates have earned their union’s support, and why. So remember that this is about more than just winning a seat.

Getting out the vote: to union members, to family, and friends is the key to winning.

That’s why the 2022 election investment package: funding巴基斯坦 to avoid staff cuts in public schools. This is about protecting our jobs, our families, and our quality of life. We need to work as hard as ever.

I’ll talk to you soon.

Cherika Carter is the WSLC’s Political and Strategic Campaign Director.

2022 LEGISLATIVE VOTING RECORD

WASHINGTON STATE LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO — 2022 LEGISLATIVE VOTING RECORD

SENATE

HB 1590 (Dolan)—Enrollment stability to avoid vacant seats in public schools. Right vote: Yes (Passed 28-21, Mar. 3)

HB 1664 (Rule)—Improves staffing of nurses, social workers, psychologists and counselors in schools. Right vote: Yes (Passed 42-2, Mar. 3)

SB 5600 (Keiser)—Expanding state-registered apprenticeship opportunities. Right vote: Yes (Passed 36-13, Mar. 7)

SB 5764 (Randall)—Enforcing apprentices get student support services and academic credit. Right vote: Yes (Passed 49, 967, Mar. 7)

HB 1846 (Schoeller amendment) Removing Project Labor Agreements from tax incentives for data centers. Right vote: NO (Failed 22-27, Mar. 10)

HB 1846 (Berg)—Final passage of bill creating tax incentives for data centers. Right vote: Yes (Passed 36-13, Mar. 10)

HB 1988 (Shewmake)—Tax referrals for clean-tech facilities with strong labor standards. Right vote: Yes (Passed 30-19, Mar. 10)

HB 2124 (Riccelli)—Establishing processes to grant legislative officials collective bargaining rights. Right vote: Yes (Passed 28-20, Mar. 10)

SB 5974 (Liias)—Transportation investment package funding. Right vote: YES (Passed 29-20, Mar. 10)

SB 5689 (Liias)—Transportation investment package. Right vote: YES (Passed 45-4, Mar. 10)

HOUSE

HB 1750—AG overtime pay—Weakening farmworker OT pay law. Sponsor: Rep. Larry Hoff

SB 5914—FOR-PROFIT ELECTRIC SCHOOL CAMPUS—Removing the requirement that electricians’ technical or trade schools be non-profits. Sponsor: Sen. Curtis King

SB 5914—For-Profit Electric Schools—Removing the requirement that electricians’ technical or trade schools be non-profits. Sponsor: Sen. Keith Wagoner


HB 1884—FORENSIC ELECTION AUDITS—Authorizing private companies/groups to audit elections. Sponsor: Rep. Brad Klippert

HB 1807—CIVIC EDUCATION—Requiring teachers who discuss “controversial issues,” such as racism and sexism, to present “diverse and countering perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective.” Sponsor: Rep. Jim Walsh

GOOD, BAD and UGLY BILL SPONSORSHIPS

Lots of bills that would have serious benefits or consequences for working families never get a full House or Senate vote. But you can tell who supports the good, bad and ugly by checking the vote. But you can tell who supports the bad, ugly bill

HB 1776—PREVAILING WAGE AT HIGH-HAZARD FACILITIES—Requiring at least the prevailing wage rate for certain workers in petroleum refining or petrochemical manufacturing.

Sponsor: Rep. Mike Sells

HB 1992—VACATION LEAVE ACTUAL—Increasing the cap on accrued vacation leave for state employees from 240 hours to 280 hours.

Sponsor: Rep. Jessica Bateman

CO-SPONSORS: Reps. Leavitt, Berry, Macket, Frank, Crane, Pdflet, Brunson, Taylor, Valdez, Slater, Kobra, McAdwen

HB 1763 / SB 5627—WORKERS’ COMP EXAM RIGHTS—Allowing injured workers to make an audio/video recordings of independent medical examinations.


SB 5891—WAREHOUSE WORK SAFETY—Protecting workers’ safety at warehouse distribution centers.

Sponsor: Sen. Steve Conway


SB 5914—FOR-PROFIT ELECTRIC SCHOOL CAMPUS—Removing the requirement that electricians’ technical or trade schools be non-profits.

Sponsor: Rep. Jessica Bateman

CO-SPONSORS: Reps. Leavitt, Berry, Macket, Frank, Crane, Pdflet, Brunson, Taylor, Valdez, Slater, Kobra, McAdwen


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Sponsor: Rep. Jessica Bateman

CO-SPONSORS: Reps. Leavitt, Berry, Macket, Frank, Crane, Pdflet, Brunson, Taylor, Valdez, Slater, Kobra, McAdwen


HB 1795 (Berry)—Prohibiting employer non-disclosure agreements regarding illegal acts. Right vote: YES (Passed 56-40, Feb. 9)

HB 1812 (Fitzgibbon)—Improving energy facility siting and permitting. Right vote: YES (Passed 55-43, Feb. 13)

HB 1868 (Riccelli)—Safe staffing standards for healthcare facilities. Right vote: YES (Passed 50-48, Feb. 14)

HB 1837 (Bronoske)—Eliminates the prohibition on safety standards to prevent repetitive stress injuries. Right vote: YES (Passed 50-48, Feb. 14)

SB 5761 (Randall)—Requiring employers to provide wage/salary information for job applicants. Right vote: YES (Passed 51-46, Mar. 1)

SB 5763 (Randall)—Eliminating sub-prevailing wages for workers with disabilities. Right vote: YES (Passed 86-9, Mar. 1)

SB 5600 (Keizer)—Expanding state-registered apprenticeship opportunities. Right vote: YES (Passed 94-4, Mar. 3)

SB 5764 (Randall)—Ensuring apprentices get student support services and academic credit. Right vote: YES (Passed 94-2, Mar. 3)

HB 1846 (Berg)—Job-creating tax incentives for data centers. Right vote: YES (Passed 68-30, Mar. 4)

HB 1988 (Shewmake)—Tax deferrals for clean-tech facilities with strong labor standards. Right vote: YES (Passed 56-40, Mar. 4)

HB 1664 (Rule)—Improves staffing of nurses, social workers, psychologists and counselors in schools. Right vote: YES (Passed 74-24, Mar. 7)

HB 1153 (Orwall)—Increasing language access in public schools. Right vote: YES (Passed 86-12, Mar. 8)

HB 1590 (Dolan)—Enrollment stabilization to avoid staff cuts in public schools. Right vote: YES (Passed 62-36, Mar. 8)

HB 2124 (Riccelli)—Establishing processes to grant legislative staffers collective bargaining rights. Right vote: YES (Passed 57-41, Mar. 10)

SB 5974 (Liias)—Transportation investment package: funding. Right vote: YES (Passed 54-44, Mar. 10)

SB 5689 (Liias)—Transportation investment package: projects. Right vote: YES (Passed 93-5, Mar. 10)
## Senate retains prohibition on ergonomic safety rules

In 2000, the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) adopted workplace ergonomics regulations requiring employers to put in place working practices to prevent incidents of musculoskeletal disorders. Three years later, business groups balked an initiative to have them repealed, which passed 53%-47%. But, in addition to repealing those regulations, the ballot measure banned L&I from ever adopting such rules.

In the two decades since, there’s been extensive research into musculoskeletal disorders associated with workplace injury and the findings show that 40 percent of Washington’s compensable workers’ comp claims are for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD). These injuries are expensive: between 2006-2015 direct costs for WMSD claims totaled $3.8 billion, or an average of $378 million a year.

HB 1847, sponsored by Rep. Dan Bronoske (D-Lakewood), set out to restore Washington state’s ability to address work-related musculoskeletal injuries and protect workers. It passed the House of Representatives on a 50-48 vote early Feb. 15 (Vote #4), but it took a marathon 9.5-hour all-night session to do so after Republican legislators decided to filibuster to try to kill the bill. Sadly, that heroic effort didn’t inspire Senate Democrats to pass the bill. It died without a Senate floor vote.

## Promoting Public Service Loan Forgiveness

Last fall, the U.S. Department of Education announced a series of changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which is designed to give student debt relief to borrowers who work full time in public service. The program, which originated in 2008, was created to address the issue of student loan default among federal and private sector workers. Many job applicants are well into the interview process before they are told what wages/benefits they will earn at the new job. When it’s not enough, both the worker and the employer’s time has been wasted. Worse, when employers conceal starting wages, it can mask and exacerbate a wage or gender pay gap. SB 5761 by Sen. Emily Randall (D-Bremerton), requires employers and job recruiters to disclose compensation before the interview process. The bill was signed by Inslee and takes effect on Jan. 1, 2023.

## Language access improved in schools

Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many school districts in Washington state rely on student, family, and community staff to act as informal interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency (LEP).
By SYBILL HYPPOLITE

Under Washington law, blockchain is defined as “a cryptographically secured, chronological, and decentralized consensus ledger or consensus database maintained via Internet, peer-to-peer network, or other similar interaction.”

Um... what?

Basically, blockchain is a type of shared database that differs from a typical database in how it stores information. Blockchains store data in blocks that are then linked together via cryptography. Even more basically, it’s a system of recording information in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to change, hack, or cheat the system.

If you’re still confused—and many are—Western States Legal Cooperator (WSLC) Executive Director Brian Robinson explains, “It’s because this technology, used most prominently for cryptocurrency, is likely to transform the world’s economy. It has the potential to affect all industry—not just finance, but also health care, music, real estate, social networks, telecommunications, supply chain management, higher education, public record keeping... you name it. In a recent survey of Fortune 500 companies, 94% reported they are planning projects using blockchain technology.”

This raises important questions about how these changes will affect workers and inequality. How will it affect jobs and working conditions? What opportunities do these technologies offer for reducing racial and economic disparities?

SB 5544, sponsored by Sen. Sharon Brown (R-Kennewick) and supported by the IBEW and the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, establishes a state workgroup to study these critical issues and report back to the Governor and Legislature by Dec. 1, 2023. That workgroup will include two individuals representing the WSLC who work in the fields impacted by blockchain technology or its applications. SB 5544 passed with near unanimous support and was signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee.

Labor organizations are an important part of this conversation for a number of reasons, including:

- Changes to the conditions of work.
- A lifetime for schools, students.
- Wea United for equitable & just schools.
- Loan repayment for nurse educators.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a broad impact on all of our lives. But perhaps the most affected among us have been schoolchildren and their parents. The WEA’s education system. First came the challenges of remote learning; then prioritizing the safety and health of students and educators as they returned to class.

But the pandemic also had the potential to wreak havoc on school district budgets and ongoing staffing challenges. Because school funding in Washington is based on enrollment, which suffered under the unprecedented declines due to COVID-19, the Washington Education Association prioritized stabilizing school funding and avoiding disruptions of student learning.

HB 1590, sponsored by Rep. Laurie Dolan (D-Olympia), stabilized funding for K-12 schools facing enrollment fluctuation in order to maintain continuity of educational services. Unfortunately, it faced the toxic politics of our time when the bill’s opponents claimed that enrollment drops were not due to COVID, but because students are being indoctrinated with gender ideology and Critical Race Theory. (Spoiler: they aren’t.) In the end, thanks to compelling testimony and advocacy from WEA members, HB 1590 passed the House 62-36 (Vote 913), passed the Senate 28-21 (Vote 197), and was signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee.

The pandemic also exposed the gulfs between the physical, social and emotional support that students need and the resources our state has committed to filling those needs. This year, WEA prioritized legislative support for students’ behavioral and mental health so that they can better learn.

HB 1664, sponsored by Rep. Alicia Rule (D-Blaine), phases in a considerate state investment in counselors, school nurses, social workers and psychologists. It passed the House 74-24 (Vote #911), the Senate 45-2 (Vote #779), and was signed by Inslee. The Legislature changed the funding formula for K-12 schools to include $91 million more for these providers of physical, mental and emotional support so when students need help, they’ll have better access to that help.

In addition to these priorities, the WEA also teamed up with AFT Washington, the Washington Nurses Association and student groups to make higher education and career training more accessible.

HB 1835, sponsored by Rep. Drew Hansen (D-Bainbridge Is.), will make a greater investment in low-interest student loans and more student outreach to promote the Washington College Grant (WCG), which is one of the most generous financial aid programs in the country and gives high school graduates and working-age adults from low- and middle-income families money for college or career training. Focus groups at community and technical colleges found only 50 percent of students knew the WCG was available, and that doesn’t need to be repaired. HB 1835 passed both houses and was signed into law.

Health care isn’t accessible if it’s not affordable. That’s why the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO continues to advocate for lower health care costs and in 2022 progress was made in addressing one of the system’s biggest cost drivers: prescription drugs.

SB 5532, sponsored by Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Des Moines) will establish a prescription drug affordability board. The state board would identify and conduct affordability reviews of drugs that either are priced at exorbitant levels or that have sharply increased in price. Supporters of the bill, including the WSLC, testified that this board will be a useful tool for restraining egregious price increases for lifesaving drugs, particularly those that have been on the market for years.

SB 5532 passed the Senate 20-20 and the House 57-39 largely on party lines with Democrats in support and Republicans siding with the pharmaceutical industry in opposition. Similar legislation was approved in 2020, but was vetoed by Gov. Jay Inslee (along with many other bills as a pandemic cost-saving measure).

This year, Inslee signed SB 5532 into law.

Also approved in 2022 was Keiser’s SB 5446 caping consumers’ out-of-pocket costs for insulin. This life-saving medication has been used for a century, but for some, its cost has skyrocketed beyond what 50 percent in recent years. Under SB 5456, health plans must cap the total amount that an enrollee must pay for a 30-day supply of insulin at $100 through 2022, and the Health Care Authority will monitor the drug’s price.

A lifeline for schools, students. Some progress on prescription drug affordability. Real changes to the conditions of work. It’s because this technology, used most prominently for cryptocurrency, is likely to transform the world’s economy. It has the potential to affect all industry—not just finance, but also health care, music, real estate, social networks, telecommunications, supply chain management, higher education, public record keeping... you name it. In a recent survey of Fortune 500 companies, 94% reported they have projects planned using blockchain technology.

This raises important questions about how these changes will affect workers and inequality. How will it affect jobs and working conditions? What opportunities do these technologies offer for reducing racial and economic disparities?

SB 5544, sponsored by Sen. Sharon Brown (R-Kennewick) and supported by the IBEW and the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, establishes a state workgroup to study these critical issues and report back to the Governor and Legislature by Dec. 1, 2023. That workgroup will include two individuals representing the WSLC who work in the fields impacted by blockchain technology or its applications. SB 5544 passed with near unanimous support and was signed into law by Gov. Jay Inslee.

Labor organizations are an important part of this conversation for a number of reasons, including:

- Changes to the conditions of work.
- A lifetime for schools, students.
- Wea United for equitable & just schools.
- Loan repayment for nurse educators.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a broad impact on all of our lives. But perhaps the most affected among us have been schoolchildren and their parents. The WEA’s education system. First came the challenges of remote learning; then prioritizing the safety and health of students and educators as they returned to class.

But the pandemic also had the potential to wreak havoc on school district budgets and ongoing staffing challenges. Because school funding in Washington is based on enrollment, which suffered under the unprecedented declines due to COVID-19, the Washington Education Association prioritized stabilizing school funding and avoiding disruptions of student learning.

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Heading into the 2021-23 biennium at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, state employees responded to budget uncertainty in 2020 by agreeing to collective bargaining agreements with no general wage increases for two years and monthly one-day furloughs for most workers. Those 24 furlough days would have equated to a 4.6% pay reduction.

It turns out that the state economy didn’t take the hit that many predicted and the biennial budget enacted in 2021 did not require those furloughs. But there were still no scheduled wage increases.

Recognizing pressures on the frontline workers of our state workforce who continued providing essential services throughout the pandemic as living costs continued to rise—and given Washington’s improved economic and revenue projections—public employer unions were able to reopen contract bargaining and negotiate for cost-of-living raises and other adjustments. Under the revised agreements, most state employees are scheduled to receive a 3.25% general wage increase on July 1, 2022. Low-wage workers will receive a graduated lump sum payment based on annual income. Due to tightening labor markets and increased resignations, targeted base range increases were negotiated for certain critical job classifications.

K-12 teachers and college faculty also sought and secured meaningful pay increases as the Legislature grappled with how best to support our schools that have been so severely tested over the last two years. Gov. Jay Inslee’s budget proposal provided for these increases and the Legislature ultimately approved a $64 billion supplemental operating budget that funded these union-negotiated raises for state employees, corrected K-12 COLAs, and supported behavioral health, child care, and homecare workers.

Meanwhile, Washington’s labor movement continues to support strong public pensions. This retirement cornerstone has eroded away in the private sector and continues to support strong public pensions. This retirement cornerstone has eroded away in the private sector and

Workers covered by the Law Enforcement and Fire Fighters Plan 2, lead by the Washington State Council of Fire Fighters, achieved a huge victory with the passage of HB 1701 (Bergquist). It will increase the benefit multiplier for LEOFF 2 members from 2.0% to 2.5% for service years between 15 and 25, while also providing a one-time lump sum for current retirees of $100 per month of service. For those who were disabled in the line of duty, and for the survivors of those who lost their lives, a minimum $20,000 benefit will also be paid.

Other public safety workers, like correctional officers and employees at state behavioral health hospitals, who are part of the Public Safety Employee Retirement System will see disability benefit improvements with passage of HB 1660 (Stokesbury).

And for teachers and public employees who retired under PERS and TRS plans 1 (which were closed in 1977), the Legislature passed SB 5676 (Conway) to provide a one-time cost-of-living adjustment of 3%. This is particularly important as Plan 1 retirees, for the most part, do not have annual adjustments to help maintain their purchasing power.

All of these raises and pension gains were made possible by union membership. It gives public employees a powerful voice to protect their rights, jobs, pay, benefits and public services—plus a powerful voice in the Legislature. If you are a public employee, make sure you are a union member and actively participate in your union’s legislative advocacy.

Washington State Council of Fire Fighters

A major investment in transportation infrastructure

Perhaps the most impressive feat of the 2022 session was passage of a $17 billion transportation investment package with no gas-tax increase. Negotiated by Transportation Committee Chairs Rep. Jake Fey (D-Tacoma) and Sen. Marko Liias (D-Lynnwood), it addresses a litany of infrastructure needs, including replacement of the I-5 Bridge over the Columbia River and the Highway 2 trestle in Snohomish County. It also invests in maintenance and preservation at historic levels and included much needed resources for local transit and multimodal options. Several new electric ferries are also funded and a down payment is made in planning for a possible regional high-speed rail line.

A controversial proposed fuel export tax was pulled late in the session and, unfortunately, replaced with ongoing investments from the state general fund and the Public Works Trust Fund, which supports local government investments in infrastructure. These join a one-time general fund transfer of $2 billion, resources from the cap-and-invest carbon pricing market (passed in 2021), an extension of certain transportation-related sales taxes/fees to fund the package.

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when industries seek incentives. The Washington Motion Picture Competitiveness program, managed by Washington FilmWorks with entertainment trade unions and employers, has been a trailblazer in this regard. Jobs with good wages, quality health care and retirement benefits are ensured before any rebates are issued. That program was greatly expanded this year (HB 1914, Riccelli) and will be able to secure more investments to support our state’s creative economy. In a similar vein, a renewal and expansion of Washington’s data center tax incentives (HB 1846, Berg) was adopted. It includes new labor standards to ensure that those who build this digital infrastructure are paid area-standard wages. It also incentivizes the use of project labor agreements. HB 1988 (Shewmake), which mirrors this tax accountability structure for the construction of clean technology manufacturing facilities, also passed as part of the state’s efforts to decarbonize our energy production.

Of course, that transition won’t occur and those jobs won’t be realized unless facilities are actually built. HB 1812 ( Fitzgerald) took a significant step forward by requiring energy facility siting and permitting. (See Page 3 for details.)

The 2022 session cannot be considered an unqualified success because some important transportation worker legislation failed to make it to the governor’s desk:

Safe staffing and patient care standards desperately needed for our health-care workers of HB 1846, Riccelli, failed to advance from the Senate Ways and Means Committee, despite strong community support. (See Page 1.)

An effort to re-energize Labor and Industries to adopt ergonomics standards for certain industries (HB 1837, Bronson) failed to get a Senate floor vote. This was a particularly disappointing failure in light of House Demo- crats’ heroic 9.5-hour fight to successfully advance the bill against a Republican filibuster (see House Vote #4).

HB 1776 (Sells), which would have added prevailing wages to a series of workplace standards established in 2019 for high-hazard facilities, like refineries, failed to move out of the House despite the original 2019 bill including that policy (it was later altered in the Senate).

Bills to improve basic healthcare standards for contracted school bus drivers (SB 5326, Robinson) and to provide the barest of protections for railroad workers who use even unpaid sick leave from retaliation (SB 5065, Kuderer) were also denied votes.

All told, an impressive amount of work was accomplished by lawmakers in 2022, though much remains as we contin-ue to adjust to life with COVID-19. The pandemic has laid bare the inadequacy of standards for workers in health care, and has demonstrated the critical importance of those in our education and public sec-
tors. Critical needs exist to ensure that we are able to recruit and retain work-ers for these positions, and it will take an even stronger presence by our members to ensure that elected officials step up to the challenge in future years.