



2021 POLICY AGENDA

We have been inspired by the resiliency and grit demonstrated by individuals, families, communities, and businesses across Washington state throughout 2020. Washington's economy experienced a seismic disruption in the wake of COVID-19. Restrictions on economic activity caused unemployment to soar and state revenue collections to plummet. With an intense focus on safe reopening, Washington's businesses brought back more than half of the jobs lost during the pandemic's early months. Tax collections rebounded significantly. Projected revenues are sufficient to cover projected maintenance level expenditures during the 2019-21 biennium, and the state now projects a 7.2% increase in revenues between the 2019-21 and 2021-23 biennia. That said, the trajectory of the virus and its economic impacts are difficult to project, and further disruptions are possible.

Businesses in sectors hardest hit by the state's shutdown orders are, as a direct result, facing large increases in state-imposed costs. Without legislative action or federal assistance, businesses will face more than \$3 billion in increased unemployment insurance taxes over the next two years. Meanwhile, limits on travel have reduced gas tax, ferry fares, and tolling revenues, which puts future transportation investments and long-term economic vitality at risk.

The benefits of economic growth and opportunity were uneven before the COVID-19 pandemic, and many communities of color, young workers, and those with a high school diploma or less are again bearing the brunt of this recession. More than two thirds of workers claiming unemployment in Washington state in late November did not have a postsecondary credential. Nationally, the unemployment rate for high school graduates was 1.8 times higher than it was for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Clearly, the credential is increasingly essential amidst the pandemic and will continue to be in the years ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic is magnifying disparities experienced by communities of color across our state. National events in 2020 catalyzed a vital public discussion on race and the impacts of racism engrained in our institutions, systems, and communities. This discourse is opening the door to historic opportunity for action to address inequity.

In 2021, the Washington Roundtable will work to advance policies that support diversified and inclusive statewide recovery. We will advocate for state fiscal practices that encourage job growth and avoid additional business costs that would hamper recovery. We will advocate for transportation investments that can support near-term job growth and long-term economic health. We will remain steadfast in our commitment to support increased credential attainment for Washington students – particularly students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and those furthest from opportunity.

Recovery will require all of us working together to pursue a better, more equitable future for all of Washington. We are fully committed to that effort.



2021 POLICY AGENDA *(continued)*

Economic Climate & Infrastructure

THE ROUNDTABLE URGES STATE POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Deliver a biennial budget that addresses projected revenue shortfalls in a manner that prioritizes services most important to long-term recovery, namely education and infrastructure.
- Avoid burdening employers with added costs that will dampen recovery.
- Pass a transportation revenue package that supports continued implementation of the 2015 Connecting Washington investment package; invests in maintenance, preservation, and culverts; supports new projects in key economic corridors; and improves mobility in urban centers. The Washington Supreme Court decision finding I-976 to be unconstitutional helps mitigate the revenue shortfall, but substantial new investment is required due to COVID-19.
- Support policies that promote economic development and job growth, particularly strategies to expand broadband availability and mitigate increases in unemployment insurance taxes.

Education

THE ROUNDTABLE URGES STATE POLICYMAKERS TO:

- Encourage the immediate actions needed at the local level to safely return Washington's K-12 students to in-person instruction as soon as possible.
- Support continued use of high-quality diagnostic tools that enable schools, educators, and families to assess student learning loss incurred during the pandemic.
- Ensure the state summative assessments are administered this spring to provide statewide, comparable data regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning.
- Maintain the state's commitment to high school graduation pathways as passed by the 2019 Legislature.
- Support policies that accelerate postsecondary enrollment and credential attainment for students furthest from opportunity, particularly our Black, Hispanic and Latinx, Indigenous and Native American, and other students who face structural racial barriers and inequity.
- Expand student access to high-quality dual-credit and dual-enrollment opportunities.
- Protect investments in financial aid, student supports, and services that drive credential attainment.
- Encourage credential completion at the state's community and technical colleges through continued support for Guided Pathways programs.
- Support student access to high-quality career connected learning opportunities.