

Why Do We Have So Many Races At The State Level?

Every four years, Washingtonians vote for not two, not four, but NINE State Executive Branch offices. The sheer number puts us in a tiny minority of states (and is a major cause of voter fatigue). The reason there are so many, though, goes back to the drafting of our state constitution in 1889. The 75 men who wrote it were determined to protect the state from undue influence from railroads and other businesses, they wanted to reduce the power of the Governor, ensure that people of Washington could speak directly to state office holder on many important issues, and they wanted to be sure that the state's resources, especially state land, were used for all of the people.

The Framers' distrust of powerful businesses also influenced the way our state executive branch is organized. The writers of our state constitution wanted more than the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. They wanted to distribute power across more offices within the executive branch, so that no one official would have too much power. They had seen in other states how easily public officials could be corrupted by wealthy business owners and interests, and they wanted to make sure that our government was honest and accountable to the voters. That's why they created an elected Commissioner of Public Lands to protect the legacy of state-owned land, for example. And that's why we have nine separately elected statewide officials in our executive branch.

STATEWIDE OFFICE DUTIES

1. **Governor**, Partisan position, Annual Salary \$171,898

Washington's executive branch is different from many others. In most states, the governor is one of three or four state elected officials, so he or she has a lot of power. In Washington, the governor is one of nine statewide elected officials.

But while Washington's governor may have less power than governors in most other states, our governor still has a lot to do.

- Deliver a State of the State address annually to the legislature
- Act as commander and chief of the State National Guard
- Create first draft of the state budget and submits it to the legislature
- Sign or veto bills or parts of bills
- Direct or hire directors of over 40 state that run state prisons and mental hospitals; provide health care and other services to low-income people, the elderly, and people with disabilities; license cars, drivers, businesses and professions; and protect the environment.
- Appoint people to boards or commissions that govern 46 agencies
- Choose the boards of trustees that govern state colleges and universities
- Collaborate with the U.S. Government and Native American Tribal Leaders
- Request federal assistance for disasters

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2. **Lieutenant Governor**, Partisan position, Annual Salary \$100,880

The Lieutenant Governor succeeds to the Governor's office if the current officeholder resigns, is incapacitated, is removed, or dies.

- Preside over the Washington State Senate
- Take on other tasks or assignments

3. **Secretary of State**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$120,459

The Secretary of State is the state's chief elections officer, chief corporations officer, and supervisor of the State Archives.

- Supervise state and local elections
- Certify the results of state primaries and general elections.
- Publish the state voters' pamphlet
- File and verify initiatives and referendums
- Register private corporations, limited partnerships and trademarks.
- Register individuals, organizations and commercial fundraisers involved in charitable solicitations.
- Administer the state's Address Confidentiality Program for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking
- Collect and preserve the historical records of the state and make those records available for research
- Coordinate the implementation of the state's records management laws
- Chair of the state Productivity Board.

4. **Attorney General**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$156,270

The Attorney General is in charge of the state's own staff of lawyers. These lawyers represent state agencies when they have legal disputes. If a state law is challenged in court, they defend the law.

- Propose legislation to further protect families and children and provide clear, just, and enforceable laws.
- Conduct education campaigns consistent with the policy goals of the office
- Pursue civil commitment of sexually violent predators
- Represent the State of Washington before the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals, and trial courts in all the cases involving the state's interest
- Defend in court state officers or employees ethically acting in their official capacities.
- Investigate and prosecute persons accused of crimes at the request of the Governor or a county prosecutor
- Advise the Governor, members of the Legislature, other state officers, and county prosecutors on legal issues

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- Give formal written attorney general's opinions on constitutional or legal questions at the request of designated public officials
- Represent the public interest in utility matters and energy facility siting

5. **State Treasurer**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$133,750

The State Treasurer manages the state's cash and debts. She or he has to make sure that the state maintains a good credit rating, so that when the state wants to borrow money, it gets low interest rates.

- Manage cash flow of all major state accounts with deposits, withdrawals and transfers
- Allocate the state's operating cash to investments that bear interest but remain available for withdrawal
- Keep careful accounts of all transactions
- Ensure that the state maintain a good credit rating
- Issue and manage the state's debt
- Manage the School Bond Guarantee Program which assures voter-approved bonds issued by school districts
- Inventory its activities, provide updates on its budgeted operating expenditures and issue summary financial reports for the current two-year state budget period
- Chair the State Finance Committee and the Public Deposit Protection Commission and serve on five other commissions

6. **State Auditor**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$120, 459

The State Auditor makes sure that everyone in state and local government follows the rules for how the public's tax dollars are spent. From offices across the state, our independent auditors help government work better and maintain public trust.

- Look at financial information and compliance with state, federal and local laws on the part of all local governments, including schools, and all state agencies, including institutions of higher education.
- Perform special investigations of fraud and whistleblower cases and referrals from our Citizen Hotline.
- Conduct performance audits of state agencies and local governments.
- Produce several annual reports addressing state, local and internal matters.
- Partner with other agencies to provide training and technical assistance to government organizations and have an extensive program to coordinate audit efficiency and to ensure high-quality audits

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7. **Superintendent of Public Instruction**, Nonpartisan position, Annual Salary \$132,883

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is in charge of the state's public schools. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) does not have direct authority over schools – locally elected school boards do.

- Distribute state funds to schools
- Implement state laws that establish academic standards that spell out what students should know and be able to do at each grade level
- Provide expert advice to local school leaders and teachers on closing opportunity gaps, increasing equity, and support all students, teachers, and families
- Works with the state's 295 public and 6 state-tribal compact schools to allocate funding and provide tools, resources, and technical assistance so every student in Washington is provided a high-quality public education
- Ensure all students are prepared for post-secondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

8. **Commissioner of Public Lands**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$130,253

The Commissioner of Public Lands manages over 3 million acres of state-owned land and 2.6 million acres of aquatic areas. Most of this land was deeded to the state by the federal government when Washington became a state. The land includes large forests that are logged to earn money for special purposes such as building public schools, maintaining the state capitol, and building state hospitals.

- Manage the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which is the largest firefighting department in Washington, manages aquatic lands, monitors cleanup and restoration from mining operations, provide scientific information about earthquakes, landslides, and sensitive ecological areas, and maintains and enhances recreational areas
- Chair State Board of Natural Resources that sets policy for state trust lands
- Chair the Forest Practices Board, which makes rules about how private landowner log their land

9. **Insurance Commissioner**, Partisan position, Annual Salary: \$121,628

The Insurance Commissioner is in charge of making sure that insurance companies treat customers fairly, and that insurance companies follow the rules.

- Protect consumers, the public interest and our state's economy through fair and efficient regulation of the insurance industry.
- Investigate complaints and answer questions from consumers
- Mediate insurance disputes and recover funds for consumers
- License and audit the 48 insurance businesses that are based in the state of Washington and regulate insurers based elsewhere that do business in Washington
- License and regulate the individuals and businesses that sell insurance in the state
- Propose legislation to correct problems with insurance companies.