



LAURIE JINKINS

STILL DISMANTLING BARRIERS

On a dank December day in 1954, the Democrats clinging to control of the Washington House of Representatives by the slenderest of margins, 50-49, assembled in a hotel ballroom to choose a new Speaker. “After three hours of wrangling, recessing and side-caucusing,” they narrowly decided on John L. O’Brien, an ambitious accountant from South Seattle. The runner-up was Julia Butler Hansen, a force of nature from tiny Cathlamet along the Columbia. Some who were there said she lost by one vote on the first ballot. One thing’s for sure: In 65 years, no woman had ever come so close. “Hopelessly disgusted with small-minded, conniving men,” the future congresswoman wondered “just how long” it would take for a woman to win the gavel.

Another 65 years.

All four contenders for Speaker of the House in 2019 were women. Laurie Jinkins’ victory, after only nine years in the Legislature, was a double first. The Tacoma Democrat is also a lesbian, “out and proud” to be a trailblazer.

Jinkins’ dad, a large-animal veterinarian in Wisconsin for 35 years, liked to say, “Experience is always the best teacher, but sometimes the cost of tuition is high.” In other words, No pain, no gain.

Dr. Jinkins’ bright, tenacious daughter has been on the front lines of the see-saw battle for equal rights since the 1980s when she arrived in Tacoma to attend law school. The failure of a municipal nondiscrimination initiative in 1990 was a galling setback. When a vocal anti-gay movement metastasized from Oregon, Jinkins became a leader of Hands Off Washington, the first statewide LGBTQ organization. In 1994, it repelled two anti-gay ballot initiatives. Three years later, however, nearly 60 percent of the electorate rejected an initiative to prohibit discrimination against homosexuals. In 2006, the state’s anti-discrimination law was finally amended to include “sexual orientation”—with a setback that summer

Facing page: Washington’s first female Speaker of the House wields the gavel. *Legislative Support Services*

when the Washington Supreme Court narrowly upheld a ban on gay marriage. The Legislature responded by approving same-sex domestic partnerships. And, in 2012, marriage equality. “Success is measured in increments,” Jinkins says. “And we’re still dismantling barriers.”

Now, as one of the most influential politicians in the Northwest, Laurie Jinkins knows she may face the fights of her life in the months and years to come. It may be necessary to erect barriers to protect rights codified by Washington voters. When the conservative majority on the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which established abortion as a constitutional right, Justice Clarence Thomas declared that the court’s landmark rulings on same-sex marriage, the right to engage in private sexual acts, and obtain contraceptives were also “demonstrably erroneous decisions.”

“What Justice Thomas is saying is that he wants to control people’s decisions about their own bodies,” Jinkins says, “whether its transgender people, other LGBTQ people, married or unmarried people who want to use contraceptives. It’s all about controlling other people. The way they’re doing it is by trying to say the Constitution should never be viewed as anything different than when it was written” 235 years ago.

Jinkins and Governor Jay Inslee, a fellow Democrat, note that Washington’s abortion rights law, enacted by referendum in 1970, is unambiguous: “The state may not deny or interfere with a pregnant individual’s right to choose to have an abortion prior to viability of the fetus, or to protect the pregnant individual’s life or health.”* As another layer of state’s rights protection, Inslee and Jinkins want to enshrine that right in the state constitution through a constitutional amendment. But that would require two-thirds majorities in both chambers of the Legislature and ratification by the voters. At this writing, Democrats have a 58-40 majority in the House and a 29-20 majority in the Senate. Proponents would need 66 votes in the House, 33 in the Senate, to advance a constitutional amendment.

Written by Justice Samuel Alito, the Supreme Court’s majority opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade* repeatedly emphasizes that the decision to abandon Roe poses no threat to other precedents hinging on a right to privacy. “Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion,” Alito wrote. The court’s three liberals warned, however, that “no one should be confident that this majority is done with its work.”

Girded for battle, Jinkins told a pro-choice rally in Seattle that women in our neighboring state of Idaho and thousands of others from around the nation will

* Fifty-six percent of the electorate favored Referendum 20 in 1970. A revised abortion rights initiative was narrowly approved in 1991.



Jinkins at a pro-choice rally and press conference in Seattle in 2022 after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. TVW

be fleeing states where abortion rights are being curtailed. And despite Washington's legacy as the first state to legalize abortion by popular vote, she said thousands of Washington women still lack access to abortion services.

No one could recall ever seeing her more forceful, more passionate. Jinkins jabbed the air with her right fist, declaring: "And as we have been for so long in this state, we'll be a beacon of light and of help, and of hope and of action for the women of this country." Then, paraphrasing an anthem by rocker Tom Petty, she vowed: "We won't back down! We won't get turned around. You can back us up to the gates of hell and we will not back down!"

If the Supreme Court should next take up a challenge to *Obergefell v. Hodges*, its 2015 split-decision in favor of same-sex marriage, Jinkins promises to be just as resolute. Advancing marriage equality was one of her key goals when she decided to run for the Legislature in 2010. Two years later, that dream was achieved.

The legislative mandate signed into law by Governor Chris Gregoire was challenged at the ballot box by opponents of same-sex-marriage. On November 6, 2012, same-sex marriage was affirmed by nearly 54 percent of the electorate. Jinkins and other gay and lesbian rights activists worry nevertheless about a new, apparently rising tide of homophobia—and the fact that only 10 of the state's 39 counties backed marriage equality. King County's overwhelming support, 67 percent of 953,600 votes cast there, was decisive.

GIVEN LAURIE JINKINS' roots in rural Wisconsin, her rise as a national gay

rights leader might seem improbable. But the oldest of Jack and Donna Jenkins' five lively kids—three daughters and two sons—was exceptional from early childhood. Born in 1964, Laurie was unfazed by risk-taking and immersed in current events, beginning in grade school. When she shared the news she had been elected Speaker, one of her sisters texted, “You always were the speaker of our house!!” Those two exclamation points speak volumes.



Jenkins as a 9-year-old member of the 4-H Club in Wisconsin. Her dad was a veterinarian. *Laurie Jenkins*

When people talk about Jenkins' dad and what he meant to the community, Lake Wobegon comes instantly to mind. If Garrison Keillor had met “Doc Jenkins” he might have had him ministering to the cows of his mythical hamlet—maybe as a Lutheran rather than a Methodist, but there'd be no mistaking the resemblance. Montfort, Wisconsin, and Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, “where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average,” could be interlocking pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of America's rural Midwest. Except Montfort is a real place, with about 700 humans and thousands of cows.

Montfort was so small that every kid—tall or short, clumsy or athletic, musical or tone-deaf—had to participate in everything. Otherwise, Laurie Jenkins says, there would be no teams, no class play or band. “So I got comfortable with trying things I didn't know if I could do, or didn't care about that much. And comfortable, too, with not being the best. Just being a team member. That was how I learned about community. Even if it wasn't the most important thing to you, if you wanted somebody to be able to do something that was important to them, you needed to help.” In middle school, the girls on the softball team competed against their mothers because there were no other teams nearby. “It took us two years before we were able to beat our moms. But we stayed together through high school and ended up becoming a top-tier team.” By then, she was one of the starters. “I was on every sports team. I was in the band, too, even though I never learned how to read music. They gave me a trombone, and I made sure to sit next to the best trombone player and do whatever she did. I did everything in high school: I partied hard. But I was a good student; I was a jock; I did

drama stuff and forensics. I was president of my high school class for three years.” There were 84 students in the Class of 1982 at Iowa-Grant High School.

Pat Raimer, a Village of Montfort trustee, is three years younger than Jinkins. He went to high school with her brother Chuck. Montfort is a tad bigger today than when they were growing up, Raimer says. Corporate farms are taking over. But Chuck Jinkins still operates Hardwood Farm, the spread his dad founded, and Montfort is still surrounded by “cornfields, cows and trout streams.” Madison, the state capital is about 60 miles away. Montfort is now less sheltered, less close-knit than when Laurie and her sibs were growing up with a classic stay-at-home mom. Though Jinkins notes that she and a high-school girlfriend—both closeted—wore each other’s class rings and had a noisy breakup in the gymnasium “in front of everybody,” she couldn’t believe no one suspected she was gay. If so, it might have raised a murmur or a few clucking tongues. Today, Raimer says, there are gay folks around town, and the attitude is “*Que sera, sera*—there’s a lot of other things to worry about!”

“Montfort was a great place to grow up,” Jinkins remembers. “But as I got to my teenage years, when it became clear to me that I was a lesbian, it got harder to be in such a small town.”

Showing dairy cattle as a 9-year-old member of the 4-H Club did nothing to inspire an interest in becoming a veterinarian, perhaps as her dad’s partner. “I thought about becoming a police officer; I thought about joining the military, which was a quick way to get out of a small town. But I was diagnosed as being a juvenile diabetic when I was 12. And that ended any thought of military service.” Today, trim and fit at 58, Jinkins is in good health, thanks to advances in the treatment of diabetes and her enthusiasm for hiking. “But in my childhood days, treatment meant that you took one insulin injection a day and tested your urine. And you survived until your early 50s, with complications. That influenced how I thought about my life. Things were always a little bit urgent. I felt a need to get things done because I didn’t think I’d have that long.”

Jinkins was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying for a bachelor’s degree in business administration when she came out as a lesbian. After receiving a master’s degree in public health administration, she enrolled at the University of Puget Sound’s Law School in the fall of 1987. Laura Wulf, her future wife, was a classmate. It was practically love at first sight. “I decided I would always live an out life,” Jinkins remembers. “I felt like secrets had really kind of nearly destroyed me.” Tacoma was a fresh start in a new place 2,000 miles from home.

The unfinished business was coming out to the folks back home. “I did a

bunch of research before writing the letter,” she remembers, laughing at herself. “That’s very much me—to get books on how to come out to your parents! Laura and I were having a party at our house when my parents called. My dad talked to me for an hour about why insurance companies fail and all sorts of other things, and never mentioned the letter. I had never talked to my dad for more than 10 or 15 minutes on the phone. It was very clear to me that he was trying to say things were OK. He just did not want to discuss it. But my mom did say, ‘We got your letter and things are fine.’ Later, she said she never had any idea I was a lesbian.”

After his retirement in 2002, Jack and Donna Jenkins built their dream house a few miles east in Dodgeville. Dr. Jenkins still drove back to Montfort several days a week to play cards with old friends at a gas station, arriving extra early “in anticipation of winning up to 28 cents in any given day,” friends remember. He died at home at the age of 77 in 2020, nine months after Laurie became Speaker of the House. Asked about her relationship with her father, Jenkins had to pause for nearly a minute to clear the catch in her throat. “My mom told me, ‘Oh my gosh, Laurie, I would have to tell him to stop bragging about you. Everywhere he went he would talk about you and what you had done.’ Also, he would respond to my e-news and give me feedback. He was a Republican, but he bragged about having voted for Obama. My mom and her family were big FDR Democrats.”

THE NEXT BIG QUESTION is “Why Tacoma?” When Jenkins decided to pursue a career in law, she realized that if she applied for and was accepted at her alma mater’s law school, “I’d probably never leave Wisconsin. I decided to push myself to go somewhere else. It was scary—and exciting.”

A college friend had traveled all over the country. “If you could live anywhere in America, where would it be?” Jenkins asked. “Puget Sound,” her friend said without hesitation.

The photos “looked amazing”—sailboats on the Sound, book-ended by the Cascades and Olympics; cities with museums, cafes and energized people—including gays and lesbians. She applied to several Northwest law schools. “The admissions director at UPS was the nicest to me, so that’s where I decided to go.” She hitched a U-Haul trailer to her Ford Escort and headed west. “From my first week in Tacoma, with Mount Rainier looming majestically as I walked to the law school downtown, I knew I’d made the right decision.”

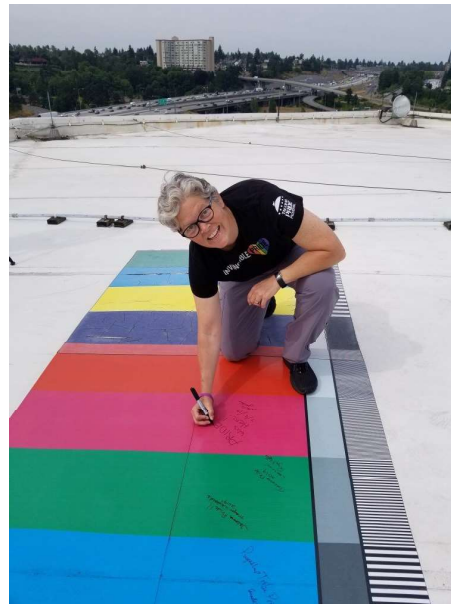
By her third year at the University of Puget Sound, Jenkins was an active member of the school’s Coalition for Diversity. She helped organize a sit-in and boycott of classes as part of a nationwide protest over the dearth of minorities and

women on law school faculties. Of the 19 tenured faculty at the UPS Law School, only two were women—and one of those was a librarian, not a professor. Yet nearly half of the school’s 825 students were women. Minority enrollment was 10 to 15 percent, but there were no people of color on the faculty, Jinkins noted. “In fact, this law school has a miserable record of converting women and minorities from tenure-track to actual tenure,” Jinkins told reporters. “There are too many white males in the legal profession and in teaching. What we’re really asking for is to end racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism at all law schools.” That’s a lot of “isms,” but Jinkins was “young and eager to make a difference.”

Tacoma had an activist gay community and a progressive City Council. In the spring of 1989, it voted 7-2 to make it illegal to discriminate against LGBT people in housing, employment, public accommodations and business transactions. Opponents gathered enough signatures to place the issue on the general election ballot that November. Jinkins joined the Committee to Protect Tacoma Human Rights, a coalition of gays, feminists and trade union members. They organized a “Ban the bigots” rally when Lon Mabon, Oregon’s militant gay rights opponent, arrived in town to stoke what he described as “a civil war of values.”

More than 80 conservative church pastors and lay leaders from around Pierce County urged voters to overturn the civil rights ordinance. In response, several ministers from Tacoma’s “mainline” congregations decried the tenor of the opposition, particularly the characterization of gay men as child molesters.

“We lost that election by 825 votes,” Jinkins remembers ruefully. “I wasn’t deeply involved in that campaign because I was immersed in law school. But the next year, after I graduated, I had more time. We convinced ourselves that the vote was so close because people were confused. A ‘yes’ vote would repeal the ordinance; a ‘no’ would uphold it. So we did a pro-active initiative, gathered signatures and put it back on the ballot in 1990. We thought, ‘If we’re clear with people and get it back on the ballot then we’ll be good.’ But we went from bad to



Jinkins on the day they raised the Pride Flag over the Tacoma Dome. *Laurie Jinkins*

worse: More than 70 percent of the voters opposed our anti-discrimination measure. That was really hard; really shocking. It was a devastating loss. I learned the importance of regrouping.”

Jinkins, only 27, was soon elected chairwoman of the Tacoma Hate Crimes Task Force. When she spotlighted the harassment of 10 Black students at Puyallup High School as the tip of an iceberg, Tacoma’s *Morning News Tribune* featured the city’s “determined, quotable” new activist in a major Q&A. “There seems to be a great deal of complacency among people when it comes to hate crimes,” columnist Art Popham observed. White supremacist and anti-gay movements were targeting the Northwest at a time when economic stresses and concerns about immigration were sowing division. “What price do we pay for people not being diligent?” he asked. Jinkins, in words that seem disquietingly prescient of America 30 years on, said: “I think we can see that the price we pay is having a very much less tolerant society. We’re showing we’re a much more divided nation than a united nation. And we really need to examine that. I think it goes to the core of everything this country is and aspires to be. And we need to be very careful to examine how tolerant or intolerant we are becoming in society. ...We need to make sure that we draw lines around people and include everyone instead of drawing lines between us.”



Jinkins and her wife, Laura Wulf, pause for a selfie at a sporting event. *Laurie Jinkins*

AFTER PASSING the bar exam, Jinkins and her partner, Laura Wulf, joined the Washington Attorney General’s Office. In lieu of marriage, the pair made a commitment to each other on February 6, 1989. Deputy Attorney General Mary Fairhurst, a future Washington Supreme Court justice, recruited both. The attorney general, Republican Ken Eikenberry, had the final say. The morning of Jinkins’ interview, the *News Tribune* featured a story quoting her criticism

of the mayor for not calling a meeting of the Hate Crimes Task Force. “We were getting calls from people saying they were coming to kill us,” Jinkins remembers.

“The attorney general and I were having a nice conversation, when he opened a manila folder with my name on it. I saw the article from the paper and thought

to myself, ‘You’re probably not getting this job!’ *And I wanted it.* But Ken looked up and said, ‘This is awful stuff! Are you OK?’ I said I was. And he said, ‘I’d like for you to work for me in this office.’ I always have given Ken Eikenberry great credit for that. He had evolved from old-guard Republican thinking. He gave me my first fulltime job after law school, and I felt like I could be out. He knew I was a lesbian—an activist, no less—and he hired me. He got more doctrinaire when he ran for governor [in 1992], but he had a good heart.”

In 1993, a new threat to the advancement of gay civil rights “oozed across the Columbia River to plant seeds of intolerance and hatred,” as Charlie Brydon, a legendary LGBTQ activist from Seattle, put it.

Though 56 percent of Oregon’s voters in 1992 had rejected Measure 9, which would have amended Oregon’s constitution to declare homosexuality “abnormal, wrong, unnatural, and perverse,” the Oregon Citizens Alliance led by Lon Mabon sprouted a Washington branch. Laurie Jinkins, her new friends, Anne Levinson, Jan Bianchi and Mona Mendoza, together with Charlie Brydon, Don Moreland, George Bakan and hundreds of other gay rights activists, mobilized to head off the OCA’s advance. Washington Citizens for Fairness launched its campaign with a catchy name suggested by Levinson: “Hands Off Washington.” The idea, Levinson explains, “was to say, ‘Look, here are these outsiders trying to come into our state, telling you that you need to discriminate against your fellow Washingtonians. And we’re not going to put up with that, right?’ ”

Levinson, an astute lawyer, had worked in the Seattle Mayor’s Office alongside Cal Anderson, who in 1987 became the state’s first openly gay legislator. Levinson remembers Jinkins as a political prodigy. As Hands Off Washington was ramping up, Jinkins taught her the importance of forming chapters because “you can’t have people from Seattle telling everybody” what to do. “What works in Tacoma, or Spokane, or Humptulips” might not work elsewhere, Levinson says. “You’ve got to let the local people decide.” Likely that was Jinkins remembering what was good for Madison probably wouldn’t go over so well in Montfort.

Washington Citizens for Fairness had a nimble board of directors, with Jinkins representing Tacoma and its dedicated corps of gay rights supporters. Every chapter was given considerable leeway. “We did overarching things like logos, materials, talking points, and overall strategy,” Levinson says. “We’d have statewide meetings by phone conference and some in person. But then we said, ‘Whatever works best for your local community is what we want you to do.’ ”

Fast forward to the 2009 campaign to preserve Washington’s new “everything but marriage” law. Levinson remembers having frequent debates with a



Laurie Jinkins with other marriage equality advocates in 2012 after Gov. Gregoire signed the same-sex marriage bill into law. From left: Margie Witt, Laurie Johnson, Jane Abbott Lightly, Pete-e Petersen, Rep. Jamie Pedersen, Rep. Jim Moeller, Jinkins, Diane Divelbess, Grethe Cammermeyer, Lynn Grotzky, Lisa Brodoff and Anne Levinson. *Laurie Jinkins*

member of the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic men’s fraternity. “He would say things like ‘You’re responsible for the end of society as we know it.’ She and Jinkins contemplated wearing T-shirts that proudly proclaimed, ‘I’m responsible for the end of society!’ ”

Jinkins laughs at that mischievous memory, quickly adding that “Hands Off was the most profound political experience” of her life so far. “My experience promoting LGBTQ rights defines everything else I do. I see analogies to every other thing I work on. My very best friends are still people like Anne Levinson and Mona Mendoza, who now lives in Hawaii. They became my mentors, together with Jan Bianchi, our state chairwoman, Charlie Brydon and George Bakan, the longtime editor of *Seattle Gay News*—sadly, all three now deceased. And let me tell you, we were all very different people! *Quite different people*. But that was a great experience to be around a table where you knew everyone was fighting for the same goals, yet with very different perspectives about how to get there. Mona was then the commissioner of the Spokane Human Rights Commission. She and I knew we needed people from outside of King County, so that was the genesis of what I told Anne when we talked strategy.” Mendoza, an award-winning educator who described herself as a “feminist-Chicana-lesbian-activist,” was “the first person who taught me about the interconnectedness of oppression,” Jinkins says. “She taught me why it was important to think about other racial communities.

She really pressed me to see the truth. That was before email was big, so she and I wrote all these letters back and forth.”

Hands Off Washington became an energized grass-roots coalition. “I think we were the first advocacy group that polled communities of color and BIPOC groups so we could get really reliable data,” Jinkins says. “We raised enough money so we could drill down deep and determine what the Black community thought; what the Asian community thought.”

In 1994, platoons of Hands Off “Bigot Busters” trailed their opponents and talked people out of signing petitions for two anti-gay initiatives. Neither gained enough signatures to qualify for the fall ballot. Hands Off was even more resourceful and resolute a year later, Jinkins remembers, thwarting two more anti-gay initiative campaigns. One aimed to counter state and local anti-discrimination ordinances and bar schools from teaching that homosexuality is an acceptable “lifestyle”; the other sought to ban adoption by gays and lesbians. “We have won this battle,” if not the war, Jinkins told reporters. “The people of this state have seen the ugly face of discrimination and rejected it. ...While we have a long way to go, we have come so very far. Washington is a warmer, safer place to be.”

She was too optimistic.

Gay rights opponents vowed to take their case directly to the state Legislature—and to the halls of Congress in the other Washington. Battle lines were being drawn all over America. When Hawaii’s Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that denying same-sex couples the right to marry violated equal-protection laws of the state’s constitution, it kindled a national debate over gay marriage. The Republicans who controlled the U.S. House and Senate passed the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. “Boxed in by his political opponents,” Bill Clinton, the first president to champion gay rights, signed it into law. Washington Senator Patty Murray and a lot of other Democrats who also voted “yea” would soon strive to make amends.

In the middle of the DOMA debate, Cal Anderson died of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a complication of AIDS. Relentless and shrewd in his determination to pass a gay civil rights bill, Anderson also was no one-trick pony. He fought for low-income housing and gun control, forging alliances across the political aisle, Jinkins and others remember. That said, there was no denying that when a talented, collegial gay person joined the Legislature it “provided an example that we’re not monsters,” as Anderson put it.

Anderson was succeeded by his protégé, Ed Murray. The Legislature’s second openly gay lawmaker strove to advance civil rights legislation while also making his mark as an all-around lawmaker, rising to Senate minority leader. Jinkins says

she and Murray had “an incredibly complicated relationship,” bound up in decisions over strategy.

WASHINGTON’S NEW GOVERNOR, Gary Locke vetoed a same-sex marriage ban passed by the Republican-controlled 1997 Legislature. Having thwarted attempts to advance anti-gay initiatives, Hands Off Washington believed the momentum was theirs.

Jenkins was president of Hands Off Washington when it spearheaded the drive to put an anti-discrimination initiative on the General Election ballot in 1997. A Hands Off survey of gays and lesbians in the Tacoma area found that more than two-thirds had experienced job discrimination. Initiative 677 emphasized, however, that the proposed law would not require employers to provide domestic partnership benefits, quotas or preferential treatment. Further, religious organizations and employers with less than eight employees would be exempt. Opponents said the initiative would force employers to adopt workplace rules “honoring and legitimizing homosexuality”—and “they still want your kids.”

Murray strongly counseled Hands Off’s leadership that the initiative was ill-timed. Cal Anderson had felt the same way about a counter-initiative strategy, according to Wayne Ehlers, a Speaker of the House in the 1980s. Ehlers had lobbied for Hands Off Washington and the Privacy Fund, the Seattle-based gay and lesbian political action committee Murray helped found. “Ed worried that if the initiative failed it would set back his legislative efforts to pass a gay civil rights bill,” Ehlers says. “Carrying on for Cal, he felt he was getting closer. But if the initiative went down badly, which we predicted, we said politicians would be wary of supporting legislation their constituents had rejected at the polls.”

“Our polling gave us optimism,” Jenkins remembers. “It was in the low 80s that people thought it was wrong to fire someone for being gay. In fact, most thought it was already illegal. So our job was to inform people that it was still legal, and they should go with their values. It’s also true that one of our problems was that the LGBT community really did not agree on whether we should do a pro-active initiative. By that time, Hands Off Washington was dominated by people who did not live in Seattle. King County already had anti-discrimination protections. So fund-raising suffered. I remember very distinctly feeling like I was Martin Luther King in the Birmingham Jail and having moderate ministers tell me that I was pushing too hard. And I was like, ‘How dare you sit there when you have these rights and protections and lecture me that I should wait!?’ So we got into a situation where our community was conflicted. I think we probably

wouldn't have won anyway, but I just didn't realize how bad it was. The divisiveness the approach raised in my community is something I will always regret and hope never to repeat. That was a really good hard lesson."

I-677 was rejected by 59.66 percent of the voters.

"That year was like a 'tsunami of no,' " Jinkins says, shaking her head at the memory. "The NRA invested more than \$2 million to fight a trigger-lock initiative. There was a medical marijuana initiative on that ballot. And another empowering dental hygienists. Every initiative lost.

"It became very clear nationally and locally that what changes people's minds forever on these topics is knowing someone personally who is LGBTQ. It becomes really evident that for queer people the most personal thing we will ever do becomes the most political thing we will ever do, which is coming out. And being out."

The ballot box whupping was followed by the Legislature's override of Governor Locke's second veto of the Defense of Marriage Act. Several Democrats helped ensure success of the override, fearing another gay rights initiative could energize conservative voters in swing districts. Jinkins was among those who now worried that back-to-back debacles at the ballot box could set back the movement for a decade. Friends and colleagues say her resilience is her strong suit. She has a shirt silk-screened with "Gotta give 'em hope," a Harvey Milk quote. "That's always what I go back to. I'm not good at all at either celebrating victory or staying in despair. I'm always about the next step. It has helped me in many roles in having that as my approach to the world."

When Jinkins laughs, which is often, it seems contagious. She is amused when someone, comfortable in her midst, remarks offhandedly that gay people now seem so, well, normal. "At the State Department of Health I worked with a guy and his wife at the very beginning of conversations about marriage equality," she remembers. "One day he came into my office and said, 'Listen, Laurie, the real issue people have about gay people is really about gay men having sex. People really don't like that. But here's what people don't get: Once you get married, people quit having sex! So everyone should be in favor of gay men getting married because then they wouldn't have to worry about men having sex anymore.' And I go, 'Well, Bob, I'm not married but I'd like to be, and I'm not sure what this says about your marriage!' I would always tease his wife that that was his argument for gay marriage."

FOR JINKINS, the next major political engagement was in 2001-2002 when the

City of Tacoma adopted an anti-discrimination ordinance protecting LGBTQ people. Tacoma United for Fairness—“TUFF” for short— squared off with backers of Help Us Take Back Tacoma Again!, the group advocating repeal of the ordinances.

“We ran that campaign with national partners who were really aligned and dedicated to helping us,” Jinkins recalls. “People were seeing that if they came out they were more accepted. National media was starting to cover more LGBTQ people. Ellen DeGeneres had come out in 1997 on national TV. All of those things played together.

“One of my more profound political experiences before I came to the Legislature was really Tacoma United for Fairness—in part because I’d been involved in the 1990 campaign that ended in disaster at the polls. So over a 12-year period I got to be part of remaking history. There’s nothing like experiencing all that pain—remembering it and seeing the damage it did to people, and then to be able to coalesce people around the same issue 12 years later and remake our community and remake history. Tacoma in 2002 retained its anti-discrimination ordinance by a larger margin [59 percent] than any city in the history of the United States had ever done before.”

The impediments LGBTQ people faced in the workplace and in denial of an array of legal rights came home in a profoundly personal way in 2001 with the arrival of Wulf Jinkins, a son for Laurie and Laura. Civil rights and same-sex domestic partnerships were still years away. “He’s my biological son,” Jinkins explains. “Laura gave birth to him and we had to adopt him to make it clear who his legal parents are.”

Jinkins volunteered for Chris Gregoire’s first campaign for attorney general, writing a briefing paper on the death penalty. She was active in every subsequent Gregoire campaign, including the historic 2004 governor’s race. “The first time I ever testified on a bill in Olympia was alongside Chris when she pressed really hard for sexual orientation to be added to existing malicious harassment ‘hate crime’ laws,” Jinkins says. “Then, when I was an assistant secretary at the Department Health, I disagreed with



Wulf Jinkins, Laurie and Laura’s son, liked to sit in the governor’s chair. *Laurie Jinkins*

some of her policy decisions in my work area. My good friend Lyle Quasim, the agency's former secretary, told me, 'Listen, Laurie, there's three kinds of jobs in the world: there's sales, there's development, and there's when you do both. You've been doing both. Now the governor is telling you she's in development, and you're in sales. If you can't sell the things she's developed then you need to go. That was good advice. I was in my mid-30s. I learned to move on and not burn bridges.'

Jinkins and Gregoire remain friends to this day.

"It's important to emphasize that Chris Gregoire touched every part of the advancement of the LGBTQ community," Jinkins says. "And when we got to the doorstep of marriage equality, I told her it was going to be an important part of her legacy, 'and I guarantee you you'll be so proud.'"

From the outside looking in, Jinkins had learned that "the Legislature transforms by increments. But we wouldn't transform at all if we didn't have people outside of us pushing for change and to protect rights."

She was adamant that Ed Murray's gay civil rights bill, stymied by the state Senate, was the crucial precursor to marriage equality. Jamie Pedersen, a gay lawyer poised to run for the Legislature, was working to advance same-sex marriage. "Every time we'd meet, I'd say, 'If you pass marriage equality you could get married, but then get fired from your job for getting married. We need anti-discrimination first.' So we had our own internal conflicts. But Jamie is a good friend who has taught me an incredible amount. He is an Eagle Scout from beginning to end."

THE BREAKTHROUGH for the gay civil rights bill came as the Legislature got under way in 2006. Senator Bill Finkbeiner of Kirkland, the former GOP minority leader, reversed his stand from the year before and crossed the aisle to vote with the Democrats.

That summer, the Washington Supreme Court's 5-4 decision to uphold the state Defense of Marriage Act revealed the justices were deeply conflicted. In a stinging dissent, Justice Bobbe Bridge, a former lobbyist for the Privacy Fund, blasted "the Legislature's blatant animosity toward gays and lesbians" and predicted the majority's ruling would be viewed by history as "a mistake born of bigotry and flawed legal reasoning."

Only a few more increments remained.

After co-chairing the victorious 2009 campaign for "everything but marriage"—when Washington became the first state in the nation to ratify domestic partnerships for same-sex couples—Jinkins talked herself into running for the Legislature:

“I was 46, and hadn’t been involved in party politics for a long time. I was very clear in the years preceding that I didn’t want to be in a policy position because I’d done that in the executive branch. I understood that I’d have to care about things that didn’t necessarily interest me. When you’re an advocate you get to choose what you advocate for. But circumstances changed. I thought I had convinced my friend Dennis Flannigan not to retire from the Legislature. A few days later, he announced he would not seek re-election. So that shows how highly persuasive I can be! I really wasn’t thinking of running at all. I had a great job as deputy director of the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, but I wasn’t developing any new skills. I was using my old skills. I was getting asked to serve on boards I had served on 20 years earlier.

“The biggest thing, however, was that it was clear that the crucial debate over marriage equality was approaching. There’d never been an out lesbian serving in the Legislature. And I thought, ‘I’ll be damned if the lesbian community is not going to be represented.’ That was never anything I ever said publicly, but every morning when I woke up, especially on mornings when it was raining, I’d think, ‘I don’t want to doorbell today!’ Then I’d say to myself, ‘Laurie, do you want to be the first out lesbian serving in the Legislature or don’t you?’ Then it was, ‘OK, I guess I’ll go out doorbelling!’

“I was excited about what I could do in terms of budgets, health care, education and all sorts of other important things. I was also a public-school mom and a longtime community college trustee. But for personal motivation, the thing that got me up every day was representing the lesbian community. That’s the thing



With Sam Reed in 2011. The secretary of state invited all the freshman legislators to his office to present them with cards certifying their election. *Laurie Jenkins*

that kept me fundraising. I frequently tell candidates, ‘You’ve got to find your ‘why,’ and the ‘why’ doesn’t have to be something you tell everyone else. It’s the thing that makes you do everything you need to do to win.”

In the fall of 2010, after a hard-fought campaign, she defeated Tacoma City Councilman Jake Fey, a fellow Democrat, for a House seat from the 27th Legislative District.

Two years later, after Senator

Mary Margaret Haugen, a centrist Democrat from Camano Island, announced she would cast the crucial 25th vote for gay marriage, Ed Murray and Jamie Pedersen's bill passed the Senate. A jubilant Gregoire signed it on Valentine's Day, 2012. Representative Jinkins was part of the cheering crowd. A Bremerton man shouting "Do not betray Christ!" was the lone protester.

Opponents secured enough signatures for a referendum.

Jinkins says the unsung heroes of the campaign to uphold marriage equality are the volunteers who staffed the phone-banks to get out the vote. "The average phone call lasted 18 minutes, largely because we were careful to ask questions in a neutral way," she says. "We'd say, 'Tell me what marriage means to you.' We wanted to engage people in real conversations. I was out in the community motivating people, recruiting, so I didn't get to make many calls. But many of the phone-bank people I talked with at our offices on Pacific Avenue in Tacoma were in tears because people they were talking to were crying, too. People disclosed incredibly intimate things about what their marriage meant to them—that they'd been divorced; why it happened; what it means to love and be loved. It was a very non-judgmental process. Frequently we never even brought up the referendum, or asked them how they were going to vote. Our job as phone bankers was to just get people thinking about what marriage meant to them—and to get people out of their stuck-spot. Because we knew if we could get them out of their stuck-spot they were moving our way. There were thousands of people all over Washington who were doing that. That's what made the difference."

That November, more than 53 percent of the voters endorsed gay marriage. The law took effect on Dec. 9. Jinkins and Wulf were married by their friend and mentor, Chief Justice Fairhurst, in front of 400 friends at Tacoma Union Station on July 20, 2013.

JINKINS' PROGRESSIVE legislative agenda included a capital gains tax to require the state's "wealthiest few to pay their fair share," paid family leave, and the nation's first program to help offset the staggering cost of long-term care.

She demonstrated early on that civility was one of her core values, praising J.T. Wilcox, the Republican floor leader, for his even-handedness. Serving on Appropriations and the Health Care and Wellness Committee, Jinkins became chairwoman of the Civil Rights and Judiciary Committee, heavily involved in mental health reforms.

When Frank Chopp, the state's longest-serving Speaker of the House, announced he would step down after the 2019 session, Jinkins felt she was ready. "As

I got better and better at being a committee chair, I started to see myself as able to pull different levers and help make things happen,” she says. “But I had not sat at the leadership table at all in a caucus where women were the majority—31 of 57 seats.* Our caucus had already decided that the next Speaker would be a woman.”

Jinkins was the senior member of the four women in the race. The others were June Robinson of Everett, Gael Tarleton of Seattle and Monica Stonier of Vancouver.

“I don’t know how it would have been had there been men in the mix,” Jinkins says. “But all four of us were committed to showing that our caucus could have a competitive speaker’s race, and that it would be OK whoever won. We’re all friends. A few days before the vote, we all got calls from different members of the communications team asking what kind of press release we wanted to have on each of our candidacies. I called the other three and said, ‘Can’t we just agree on one press release, and a joint statement on whoever wins—congratulating the winner, and saying we stand with her?’

“None of us knew who was going to win. I thought I was a good vote-counter and that I had a good shot, but the extraordinary thing about the four women who ran for speaker is that it was going to be the same statement no matter who won. I respect each of them deeply. I don’t know if I would have asked that had there been men in the race. I don’t know if it would have worked.”

Why did Jinkins win? “If you serve the caucus well you’ll do well if you decide you want to try to become speaker,” she says. “I chaired the highest-volume committee in the Legislature, so I really focused on moving other people’s bills. It was an easy thing to do because I enjoyed it. The second thing was that I talked to people about what they wanted in a speaker. I was pretty clear that I wasn’t



With Speaker Frank Chopp. *Laurie Jinkins*

* When Julia Butler Hansen ran for Speaker of the House in 1955, there were nine women in the entire Legislature, four Democrats and five Republicans—all in the House. In 2023, there are 36 female Democrats and 10 female Republicans in the House, and 14 female Democrats and six female Republicans in the State Senate, for a total of 66 female legislators.

Frank, and that there were other things that I wasn't. I probably talked to a third of the caucus before I decided to run. It helped me decide whether I wanted to run. But it also helped me shape the kind of speaker I wanted to be. In the end, I won and those of us running also accomplished another goal: we had a competitive race and we all still work together very well."

Jinkins soon found herself dealing with the deadliest public-health crisis in more than a century; mask-mandate protests; moves to expel a Spokane Republican accused of "domestic terrorism," and a controversy over how the House releases investigative reports reviewing allegations of misconduct or inappropriate behavior by lawmakers. As news organizations pushed public-records requests, Jinkins said, "I may be equally or maybe more frustrated than you are." Admitting she had made "a huge mistake" in 2018 when she supported leadership's move to dilute the Public Records Act's impact on legislators, Jinkins said, "This place has a lot more inertia than I was actually prepared for. I want transparency and I also want complainants to be protected."

A year later, in the wake of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, Trump supporters converged on the Capitol Campus in Olympia and broke through security at the Governor's Mansion.

The 2022 Legislature got under way almost fully virtual, and adjourned 60 days later with more than half its members on the floor, albeit masked and mostly socially distant. Nevertheless, Jinkins says the lawmakers approved a \$64 billion supplemental budget that includes investments in statewide transportation projects, K-12 education, pandemic recovery, and affordable housing, with \$800 million in reserves. In response to the death of a fraternity pledge at Pullman, it also unanimously passed an anti-hazing bill that mirrors Jinkins' anti-bullying efforts decades earlier.



Chief Justice Mary Fairhurst administers the oath of office to Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins as Jinkins' spouse, Laura Wulf, and their son, Wulf Jinkins, look on in 2020. *Legislative Support Services*



A congratulatory cake for the new speaker. *Laurie Jenkins*

“There is virtually no one serving in the House who knows a speaker other than Frank Chopp, so everything I do is compared to him. He sets the standard, good and bad,” Jenkins says. “And my guess is that he changed a lot over the 20 years he was speaker. I see myself learning and changing during my three years in this role. I now understand things he did that I didn’t understand before. I sometimes find myself saying, ‘I’m turning into Frank Chopp.’ Especially when I stop to think, ‘Oh, now I understand why he did this. It’s not a bad idea after all.’ There are lots of things he did that I’m going to keep, like establishing a Committee on Committees to appoint committee chairs and members. And, there are things that are changing, especially

because we need to bring the way we work into the 21st century.

“But most of the time I’m just me, trying to put in practice all the things I’ve learned since I first came out and became an activist. I strive to keep learning. The minute I set foot in the House of Representatives, I knew it was my home. I knew there was no other place I ever wanted to serve. I’ve only ever run for one office. I just run for it over and over again until I get it perfect!” Jenkins says, laughing.

“There’s no end to learning. The great thing about history is to evolve and learn—and always be learning. Never stop learning because it teaches you how to move the world forward.”

You also learn that success is mostly measured in increments.

John C. Hughes