

"Moving Washington Forward"

Governor Chris Gregoire
Bi-State Governor's Conference
March 16, 2006
As prepared for delivery

Thank you, Chancellor Dengerink, for that kind introduction. I'm grateful for your leadership of WSU Vancouver, and for the opportunities your great school extends to students in Southwest Washington-and to all the residents of our bi-state region.

I'm also delighted to join with my colleague, Governor Kulongoski, and to say "thank you!" for serving as host of this Bi-State Conference.

The Peace Arch marking the border with British Columbia celebrates our shared heritage as "Children of a Common Mother."

We need to split the difference and build a similar monument on the Columbia River. It might read, "Children of a common mother, father, cousin, employer, highway, and infrastructure!"

Okay, "Children of a Common Infrastructure" doesn't quite have the same poetic ring as the Peace Arch inscription!

But we are part of the same family-and what we do politically, educationally, and economically has a ripple effect.

Today we have the opportunity to benefit from a shared vision of a bi-state economic region with a shared destiny for a thriving, regional economy.

We start with Chancellor Dengerink and the critical link between higher education and workforce training.

For me, the role of government is to create a world-class education system and to make sure our prosperity touches all of us, not just a few.

Companies want to know that we have a well-trained, educated, modern workforce. And they also want good schools for their children and their employees' children.

When we evaluate the educational systems in Washington and Oregon, we shouldn't compare them to other states. To do so, we are comparing ourselves to a mediocre educational system.

To survive, we need to go toe-to-toe with Japan, Germany, Ireland, and the top schools in India. Or any number of countries that invest more and get better results from their schools than us.

When I entered office, I said that we need a comprehensive study of our entire education system, from top to bottom. We need an integrated vision to bind our early education, K-12, and higher-ed systems together. We need to see education as an aggregate whole, as a kind of seamless fabric. I know my friend, Governor Kulongoski, shares that vision.

That's why I created "Washington Learns," a comprehensive, 18-month "boot-camp" assessment of what needs to be done now-serious recommendations with teeth.

I care so much about this initiative, I am personally chairing our committee, and I believe it will provide a roadmap-quite literally-for the future of our state and, by extension, to our bi-state region.

Now, I am not a fan of studies designed to drop-kick issues or commission reports archived and moldering in the basement of the state library!

Washington Learns is part of my non-"dust-collecting studies" agenda-and we're getting so much done, enacting and breathing life into so many of the recommendations, that dust doesn't have time to settle!

For example, the Washington Learns Interim Report recommended the creation of a cabinet-level department of early learning with a director appointed by the Governor. I will sign legislation soon that will do just that -creates a Department of Early Learning and consolidates more than a half-dozen childcare and early learning programs. The new focus will help in our work with the private sector to direct investments and improve coordination between early learning and K-12.

The Washington Learns Interim Report recommended investing in intensive, focused, academic support for high school students who need extra help to meet the state's academic requirements in reading, writing, and mathematics-and provide schools and classroom teachers with additional resources specifically for that purpose. I will sign legislation that does just that-\$28.5 million to help students who have been unsuccessful in meeting standards.

Washington Learns called for developing new career pathways that lead to apprenticeships after graduation. And I will sign legislation next week that does just that-permitting up to 10 school districts to qualify for "Running Start" grants to prepare interested students for the building trades and crafts.

We also have a yardstick to measure our success. It can be narrowed down to a simple question, "what's best for our students?"

A student-focused vision sounds obvious-but it's not. In education, as in government, as in the private sector, there's a tendency to grow territorial. Fiefdoms and inter-agency squabbles are symptoms of a more serious disease that can cloud and infect the thinking of many otherwise very smart folks.

We won't let that happen.

Right now we need to re-evaluate our whole education system. We need to take up the challenge from Bill Gates and create an educational system for tomorrow's workforce-not yesterday's. And we can't get there with piecemeal fixes.

The vision we've crafted for the future of education has heft, and that's why our final report this fall will be so critical.

Education, I realize, is only one feature of today's bi-state forum, but I'd argue it's the "first among equals," the cornerstone for economic co-development and even "smart energy."

Smart energy and alternative fuels are a key part of Governor Kulongoski's vision-a blueprint for economic development that we both share.

Looking at emerging industries, we have tremendous opportunity in alternative energy and the life sciences.

Low energy costs are no longer an asset for us in the Northwest. We need greater energy independence. Because of our unique mix of resources, our states are built to lead the world in bio-fuels.

We're trying to promote the Northwest's leadership in bio-fuels by using economic fundamentals: Supply and demand. On the demand side, we passed legislation this session to gradually increase the percentage of bio-fuels in our fuel supply, because we must reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Entering this industry is a risk for farmers, so we have to help generate the marketplace for them - and help companies that will create these fuels from our crops.

We need to advance both of these strategies together so that we can keep some of the \$25 million a day we spend on fuel in Washington State in our community.

We've also taken steps to lead in the quickly growing life sciences, which depend on our agriculture and our schools.

But we need to turn research into products and services.

Last fall, I launched my Global Competitiveness Council, which will deliver its comprehensive report later this month.

I firmly believe that we can't continue to compare ourselves only to other states and regions. Instead we must evaluate our global landscape to determine what to do to create a truly globally competitive region.

This is not a council with a fuzzy mission. There are three very clear objectives:

§ Our first objective is to ensure that the State of Washington be recognized throughout the world as a place for business to thrive, a hub of distribution for products and services, a source of world-class products and services, and an ideal tourist destination.

§ Second, to position Washington as a progressive, globally competitive state, committed to a world-class educated and trained workforce.

§ The third objective is to develop a comprehensive and effective international trade strategy to include state agencies, local and regional government and non-governmental organizations, business, labor and educational institutions.

The Council's task is challenging, but not impossible. I'm confident they'll provide the compass our region needs to chart our unique course in the global economy.

And I am pleased to report that, as we move forward with a crucial bi-state project for our economic health and quality of life, the Columbia River Crossing Project will enhance the ability of citizens from each side of the Columbia to work, travel, and to deliver goods and services by solving a major bottleneck.

A vital economy requires an effective and efficient transportation system and this project is a key component for a thriving regional economy. While there is no disagreement that the challenge exists, to succeed we, as a region, must remain focused on our goal.

No discussion of transportation would be sufficient without a heartfelt "thank you" to the elected officials and citizens in SW Washington who helped pass the 2005 transportation package -- something many said could not be done. This is critical for the Columbia River Crossing Project and a very real indication of an investment in our communities.

Thank you for having me here today and for hosting this bi-state conference.

Like Louis Pasteur said, and Tom Friedman quoted in his book, *The Earth is Flat* :
"Fortune favors the prepared mind."

We're going to remain strong. We're going to fix what's wrong and build on what's right.

Now, we have to apply the same problem-solving mentality we see in this room today back in our regional businesses and government.

And put all this talk into action. Let's get to work!

Thank you.