

State of the County address

Feb. 20, 2014

I like to tell anybody who will listen that Snohomish County is the best county in the world, and I believe it is.

We have had some outstanding leaders in our county, leaders at every level. So I want all of you to know that I am honored and humbled to serve as executive of this great county.

Together, we have weathered an economic recession and a slow recovery, the good fight to keep thousands of legacy jobs in our county, and a transition in leadership followed by a period of healing.

Today, I am here to speak to your hopes – not your fears, to assure you that together, we are moving in the right direction. And to remind you that we are a people of resilience, resourcefulness and respect.

Since being appointed in June, I've been telling anyone who asks that my vision for Snohomish County centers on safe schools, good safe roads and jobs, jobs, jobs. Better stated: Children learning and parents earning.

I wasn't in office long before it became clear we were in the fight of our lives to keep thousands of aerospace jobs in our county. I call these jobs legacy jobs. Legacy jobs are family-wage jobs that instill pride in people for generations; jobs that shape and define a region. And finally, legacy jobs are jobs that leave our mark on the world.

We were at risk of losing these jobs if we didn't land the 777X.

Great achievements are not without sacrifice and hard work. This was never more evident than in the competition for the economic health of our region. I want to take a moment to recognize our talented and skilled aerospace Machinists. Without their talents, dedication to their craft and willingness to sacrifice at the bargaining table, there is no doubt that we would have lost tens of thousands of legacy jobs forever.

Please join me in thanking them for their efforts.

I also want to recognize Everett mayor Ray Stephanson, his executive director Pat McClain, as well as Economic Alliance CEO Troy McClelland and, of course, former Snohomish County executive Bob Drewel. Thank you for your hard work.

We no longer have to wonder who will build the 777X and its composite wings, nor where. We know that it will be built by the finest aerospace workers in the world, right here in Snohomish County. We also know that our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to design and build the best airplanes in the world, again, right here in Snohomish County.

I want to thank two members of my staff who worked for months and months to land the 777X, no matter what the headlines said from day to day. They moved forward on site designs, expedited permitting, and preparation for construction. So I want to extend my admiration and appreciation to Peter Camp and Dave Waggoner. Thank you for your excellent work.

Finally, I want to thank the members of our County Council for being great diplomats for our county. Councilmember Stephanie Wright did so much to promote Snohomish County as a great place to do business. She is a great ambassador for our county.

Following on the success of the 777X, I believe we must continue to build upon our global connections and partnerships. Sixty percent of jobs in Snohomish County are tied to international trade. Sixty percent. That makes Snohomish County the second-most trade dependent county in the United States. Exports account for 30 percent of our county's gross domestic product – the most of any county in the state – and one of the highest in the country.

While most of these jobs are linked to aerospace, we cannot overlook travel and tourism, retail trade, electronics and other manufacturing sectors. I'm excited to introduce our new director of trade and economic development, Sean Connell. Sean recently returned to Everett after serving as executive director of the U.S-Korea business council – and director for Japan and Korea – for the United States chamber of commerce. Sean knows that our prosperity depends on expanding our international relationships and encouraging international partners to invest in Snohomish County workers and communities.

Simply put, what I told Sean is this: If it is grown or produced in Snohomish County, I want him to find a buyer for it.

Welcome home, Sean. You have a lot of work ahead of you.

Closer to home, you'll notice another shining example of economic development. In 2015, you will be able to visit the county's first year-round farmers' market down the street on Grand Avenue.

Several years ago, our farmers told us they needed a year-round farmers' market, a facility to process their fruits and vegetables, and a commercial kitchen that would help get their products to market. All of this is coming to fruition as farmers partner with the county, the city of Everett and developer Lobsang Dargey in the development of the new Snohomish County food hub.

The food hub will not only create jobs, it will provide access to healthy, local foods and preserve our precious farmland.

I want to acknowledge the dedication and tenacity of our agriculture coordinator Linda Neunzig. Linda is a true public servant and a problem solver.

No matter what we pursue in economic development, no matter how aggressive and innovative we are we will find ourselves at a serious disadvantage if we don't have the infrastructure in place to support it. You know what I am talking about. I am talking about good, safe roads.

We cannot succeed as a county without a reliable transportation infrastructure. We need quality roads so goods can reach our businesses, our workers can get to work, and our students can get to school. Transportation is a vital part of Snohomish County and we are committed to improving and expanding all aspects of our transportation infrastructure.

Another mark of success as a county is our ability and our willingness to mentor the next generation of public servants: Those students preparing to enter our workforce and make a difference in our county. To that end, we have created an internship and mentoring program for students interested in pursuing careers in public service. Our internship program, managed by our new coordinator Shawna Ousse allows us to partner with local community college students who want to work alongside our staff and learn from them.

I am excited about what this means for our students and the future of local government. Please take a moment to recognize Shawna.

Those of you who know me know I am passionate about the safety of our children and our schools. I believe that safe schools are the foundation of a strong education system that supports the success or failure of all other aspects of our communities. I also believe that if we do not keep our children safe, very little else we do will matter.

Our program SKIP, safe kids improved pathways, allows us to partner with school districts and the sheriff's office to design and pay for safe pathways and sidewalks for elementary school children. We have dedicated half a million dollars a year to eliminate sidewalk gaps near our 34 county elementary schools, and we expect to begin construction this summer.

A new courthouse is also high on our priority list. The current courthouse simply doesn't work – neither in space, nor safety. We need a courthouse that is bigger, safer and has the capacity to serve our growing population – a population that is growing as we speak. A new courthouse will provide security for our judges, our staff and our public. Construction should start in January 2015.

Since I am on the topic of public safety, please join me in recognizing the men and women who invest their lives to keep us safe in our homes, on our streets and protect our children in our schools: Our law enforcement officers.

And please join me in thanking those serving in our military. Thank you for your service.

I want to take a moment to talk about serving the most valuable in our community. A day rarely passes that I'm not reminded of what vice president Hubert Humphrey said many years ago. Vice president Humphrey said that *"the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."*

I've already shared with you one of the projects we're working on to help our children. Now I want to share with you how we are serving our seniors, and reaching out to those living with mental illness. We are blessed to have more than 100,000 seniors living in our county. That is a wealth of wisdom and service.

The programs operated or contracted out by our long term care and aging staff touches about 50 percent of this treasured community. Let's take a look at this by the numbers:

Last year, our staff and volunteers made more than 1,000 visits to those living in adult family homes, nursing homes and assisted living facilities. They provided information, advocacy and complaint resolution services.

Our volunteers contributed nearly 3,000 hours of service. Our family caregiver support program provided nearly 2,500 training sessions, 1,400 support group sessions and 12,000 hours of respite to unpaid caregivers. And in 2014, our council on aging members will recommend vital programs to senior centers and other community gathering places. I am pleased that we are able to honor and support our

Snohomish County senior community.

There's another group that deserves our attention: Those living in our community with mental illness. After I became county executive, we convened a panel of licensed mental health therapists to provide recommendations for improving mental health services in Snohomish County. Their recommendations will be released later this month and we will review them to establish priorities and objectives.

To those in our community living with mental illness, and to their family and friends, our message is this: Mental illness is not who you are, it does not define you, and you are not alone. Snohomish County cares.

Another area of importance to is environmental responsibility. It's not enough to say our county practices sustainability; we want to be a champion for sustainable government, whether it's through our PrintWise campaign to reduce printing and paper use, or through an innovative partnership between our parks department and Waste Management to make recycling easier in our parks. We are committed to preserving our environment to the best of our ability.

For the first time in county government history, we have an internal environmental action plan. We have specific goals and timelines established to reduce energy and water consumption in our buildings, to increase recycling, and to purchase green products. We have established a successful low-interest loan program for county homeowners making energy savings upgrades to their homes. In just 21 months, the program has made 318 loans totaling more than three million dollars. And our county solid waste division and office of environmental sustainability are working with Washington State University Extension to help farmers use compost – made from local food and yard waste – on their crops. I want to recognize Lisa Dulude for all her hard work.

Finally, I want to talk to you about transparency and accountability in Snohomish County. We learned the hard way how critical good leadership is to the success of any organization – especially our government. Equally important are good policies and procedures to guide us and hold us accountable. I'm proud of the newly created ombudsman position, and I'm equally proud of the man serving as our ombudsman.

John Koster is not only a fair, firm and honest man, he also cares about our community. He strives to do right because it's woven into his moral fiber. Like me, John believes integrity is not a partisan quality. Integrity belongs to anyone willing to make the sacrifices necessary to practice it in their daily lives. John's great work will serve our county well and help us continue the healing process.

We are also taking on the task of developing a new strategic plan. It's hard to admit how long it has been since we got together – elected officials and department directors – to develop a vision, a mission and goals. We need a road map – for ourselves, our employees and the greater community. We are one county government and we can come together to chart our future course and measure our success. Our citizens expect nothing less.

We have so many good things going on in Snohomish County government. I wish I could tell you more, but I know I've filled your brain with projects, statistics and numbers.

I want to leave you with one more number: 2,700. Twenty-seven hundred. That's the number of Snohomish County employees dedicated to serving you. This is an amazing group of ambassadors and I'm honored to work with them every day. They have endured a season of challenge – through no fault of their own – and they've come out the other side with grace and strength. While I stand here today telling you all the good work going on in our county, they are the ones carrying out that good work every day. We could not succeed without them.

When I started speaking, I made reference to, "what a difference a year makes." The truth is, what a difference we all made together in less than a year.

Thank you for sharing part of your morning with me.

If you came here wondering about the state of our county, I am here to tell you the state of our county is great and getting better each day. We have every reason to be excited, every reason to continue pursuing our goals, every reason to serve with pride, and every reason to be a people of hope.

Thank you and good morning.