

2013 STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
King County Executive Dow Constantine
Museum of History and Industry, Seattle
February 4, 2013

PREPARED REMARKS

Chair Gossett and councilmembers, elected leaders, valued employees, and the people of King County:

Here at this remarkable new home for our Museum of History and Industry, are the signs and symbols of our collective experience ... from the J.P. Patches suit to the Rainier Beer sign above us and, yes, the Lusty Lady marquee that the museum now has proclaiming: "We support Forward Thrust."

Like many of you, I grew up here and feel a deep connection to this place, our home. The NBA championship trophy here reminds us how we united in celebration of the '79 Sonics, and how losing the team tore away part of our legacy. To be on the cusp of bringing the Sonics back to town is just remarkable.

I asked that we meet here today so that – surrounded and informed by our shared past – we might consider what we want our legacy to be – what future we might leave to our children.

We're just emerging from the worst recession since the Great Depression. But our government is back on sound financial footing because, as the elected leadership of this county, we made the wise choices, and the difficult decisions.

Thanks to our work together, the state of our King County government is strong. And with that strength we can fulfill our role in keeping the entire county strong and healthy – its economy, its people, its natural wonder.

But King County will remain strong only if we are willing to level with ourselves and our people about what it takes to stay on top.

One exhibit here could not have escaped your attention – the one that asks, "What if we'd built these projects?" It was once proposed that all of Mercer Island be preserved as a park. Can you imagine? Visualize: Park Ranger Fred Jarrett. So how will we, in 2013, be viewed by our descendants 40 or 50 years from now?

I am sure that none of us went to the trouble of getting elected just to preside over the decline of a great region. So let's agree now that our job as elected officials - and as employees and as members of this community – is to preserve and protect this place with which we have been entrusted, to have an honest discussion about the needs of the future, and then to act boldly, in the brief time we are given, to meet those needs.

We've accomplished so much over the past three years by being methodical, persistent, and focused.

We tamed the inflationary beast of healthcare costs – a national threat to our local success – and have a healthier balance sheet - and workforce - to show for it. Our Lean management is emulated by other governments as a model. Our customer service is continuously improving.

It was one of my proudest moments in office to see how efficiently our staff issued the first marriage licenses in the state to hundreds of same-sex couples. Over three long days, King County workers delivered the kind of respect and customer service that made us all proud. We made history. It was widely praised as government at its finest.

None of these reforms would be possible without great employees. King County is setting the standard for productive partnerships with our workforce. With us today are the leaders of many of our labor unions, the King County Labor Coalition, and the Martin Luther King County Labor Council. You are our partners in the reforms making King County successful.

As a result of our record of efficiency and reform, doors are opening to us that were once tightly closed. And locked.

At the state, we showed how Metro Transit has wrung savings and efficiencies from its operations, and used data to prioritize productivity and equity. As a result, we earned the trust of state lawmakers who gave King County, and only King County, the authority to fund temporary preservation of transit. And a supermajority of this Council stepped up and met the challenge and saved our bus service.

Twenty-five of our cities – recognizing improved practices and new management in our animal care and control – renewed their contracts for the Regional Animal Services model. When I came into office, we were talking of having to shut it down; now the new name for our shelter, the King County Pet Adoption Center, says it all: a fundamental commitment to humane care.

That same demonstrated competence and transparency assured voters they could entrust us with the resources to replace the deteriorating Youth Services Center. Building a new Children and Family Justice Center from the ground up -- in close collaboration with our courts – lets us bring together all our best practices to save money and save more kids from a life of crime.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the collegial collaboration of members of the King County Council. I want to thank you for continuing the work we began together more than a decade ago. Will you please stand and be recognized.

Now I ask for a broader partnership – to build from our reform work inside of County Government, to secure a stronger foundation for our region’s future success.

The strength of our county, the prosperity of our region, rely on the creation, preservation and expansion of infrastructure. I’m talking about bricks and mortar, but I am also speaking about more than our built infrastructure. Let’s also consider our natural

infrastructure, and our human infrastructure: Three, indispensable, interlocking pieces that form the basis for our past, and our future, success. Only by investing in each of these areas will we create the opportunity for continued prosperity.

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Our **HUMAN infrastructure**: The institutions that support the development of an educated, creative, productive, healthy and free people. Our economy and our quality of life depend on everyone having the opportunity to fulfill their potential - to thrive and succeed through merit and hard work.

While the recession certainly has not ended for some, as a whole the state of our economy is improving. From the depths of the recession three years ago, unemployment in King County has been driven down by more than a third - from 9.6 percent in 2010 to 6.1 percent today, well below the state and national rates. In that time, our King County economy has produced 50,000 new jobs.

We're in better shape than the state and the nation, thanks in part to the strength of our aerospace, high-tech, and other local industries, and the 21st century jobs these industries support.

The King County Aerospace Alliance we created is helping connect people to the education and training that lead to jobs at Boeing and its hundreds of suppliers - like our program at WorkSource Renton that helps returning veterans convert the skills they learned in the military into family-wage jobs in aerospace. The HERO Program - our new Veterans Internship Initiative - just placed its first 10 veterans into six-month internships throughout County government.

But for our veterans, so much more is needed. King County is home to 127,000 veterans and military personnel - more than the entire population of Bellevue, our second-largest city. The County has a long legacy of honoring the service and sacrifice of our returning veterans with a range of programs, many through the voter-approved Veterans Levy.

But uneven coordination across federal, state, local and nonprofit systems means vets often aren't connected to the services they need - and have earned. It's said four of every ten veterans are unaware of their benefits or how to access them. As regional leaders we are in a position to supply those connections.

For that reason I've asked three extraordinary individuals - a four-star general, a decorated Army nurse, and an infantry officer - to work with me and our veterans' advisory boards to create a model system of care for veterans and their families.

Each brings knowledge, experience and a personal commitment to helping veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life: General Peter Chiarelli, former U.S. Army Vice Chief of Staff; Col. Grethe Cammermeyer, retired Chief Nurse of the Washington State National Guard; and Leo Flor, a former Army Infantry Officer and local

veterans advocate. Leo Flor is here today. I would like to ask him, and all those who have served in our nation's military, to stand and accept our heartfelt thanks.

Federal healthcare reform was hard-won, and presents an opportunity we must not miss. Starting in 2014, the new law will open eligibility to healthcare coverage for as many as 180,000 uninsured residents of King County – whether through Medicaid, the new state insurance marketplace, or their employers.

Thanks to this historic change, we can connect people to effective preventive care early, rather than expensive treatment later. Our goal is nothing less than the full enrollment of those 180,000 uninsured who are now eligible for insurance.

To reach them, our Equity and Social Justice team is mobilizing every County agency with direct contact with the public. To broaden our reach, I am launching a Leadership Circle, drawn from all sectors of our community. Together we will create a culture of coverage in King County – saving money, and saving lives.

To lead outreach in their sectors, and help shape our strategies, three prominent community members have stepped up to lead this effort with us: From the health sector, Tom Gibbon of Swedish Medical Center; from business, Maud Daudon of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce; and from the non-profit sector, Gordon McHenry, Jr. of Solid Ground. Will these three chairs of our Leadership Circle stand so we can thank you.

The breakthrough in national healthcare reform provides a second opportunity, one without precedent – an opportunity to reform an inefficient hodgepodge of federal, state, and local funding, and create a more rational, outcome-based, client-centered system. Together with this Council, and a broad group of stakeholders, we are developing a plan for an integrated system of health and human services that is more efficient, more effective, and adequately funded.

Four principles will guide this work: Health is bigger than health care. People are at the center of all we do. Prevention is good practice, and it saves money. And, consistent with all of our reform efforts, we invest in what works. Several of our human service partners are with us today, and I thank them for their dedication and hard work.

Criminal justice and public safety are also part of our human infrastructure. For nearly 40 years, in our courtrooms, the County has provided public defenders for those accused of crimes but unable to pay for an attorney. These defense attorneys and staff have earned King County a national reputation for excellence, and we can be proud of their work.

Defense services, historically, have been contracted out to private, non-profit corporations. Seven years ago the employees of these private agencies sued the County to obtain public retirement benefits. The state Supreme Court ruled that the private defense firms were, in its words, "arms and agencies" of the government, and that the defenders were therefore public employees for the purposes of retirement benefits.

Because of this, I've sent the Council a tentative settlement under which the defenders will in fact become full County employees on July 1st, when the agency contracts expire.

We are proud to welcome public defenders as County employees. This is a new reality, and one we did not choose – but it's a reality that requires a different model for the employees and for County government. We've looked at many jurisdictions. We found none where hundreds of public employees work for – and are hired and trained, managed and disciplined, promoted and fired – by a private agency.

I will soon send the Council a plan to deal with this new reality. I know the Council shares my commitment - that public defense in King County will continue to meet the highest standards, and be delivered in a way that is client-centered, free from political influence, and cost-effective for the public.

Our sense of what makes a community safe has been badly shaken by a string of mass shootings here and across the country. It is true that we as local governments do not have the authority to require background checks, or safe storage, or prohibit assault weapons.

State and federal law pre-empt our ability to regulate firearms. But that should not stop us from thinking innovatively about what we can do within our own authority.

Gun violence is a public safety crisis. It is also a public health crisis. Locally, we can approach gun violence as a preventable public health problem – and attack it through the kind of proven public health strategies that have reduced deaths from smoking, auto accidents, and sudden infant death syndrome.

Let's start with the data. Over the past five years, 625 King County residents were killed by guns. Two-thirds of these gun deaths were suicides.

Today I am issuing an executive order directing our Public Health department to develop innovative local strategies for preventing gun violence. With the right data, we can develop local solutions to impact this epidemic. Among the actions I am ordering: Public Health will conduct a quarterly Youth Shooting Review, modeled after the existing Child Death Review, to look for patterns in how guns are used by and against our children.

I will work with the Council and the Board of Health, local elected officials and community partners to do what we can to understand the underlying causes of gun violence in King County – and develop real-world solutions to prevent real-life tragedies. If we can prevent one child, one innocent bystander, anyone, from being a victim of gun violence, our effort as a community will have been worth it.

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A second, indispensable asset is our **NATURAL infrastructure**: The mountains and water and forests that attracted so many of us here and keep us here generation after

generation, that provide us so much of what we consider our quality of life.

Climate change is back on top of the national agenda, and for good reason: last year was, once again, the warmest year on record in the U.S. As a local jurisdiction, King County is leading the way in addressing climate change.

Today I am pleased to announce that King County has surpassed its ambitious goal of meeting more than half of our energy needs with renewable energy. Moreover, we're cutting our energy needs – saving our planet, and saving the public more than \$2 million a year.

At the same time, threats from beyond our borders could erase all of our progress. I strongly oppose and will continue to oppose mile-and-a-half-long coal trains running through our county. Not only do coal trains threaten our local health, safety, mobility and economy, but burning that coal overseas will create greenhouse gasses equal to all the emissions in all of Washington State. That's not right. It's madness. We can do better. So much better.

One of the most profound environmental and economic investments we must make is to clean up Puget Sound. The science is irrefutable: contaminated rainwater and runoff is degrading our waterways – threatening shellfish, salmon, and endangered Orcas. Rigorous new state standards require every regional jurisdiction to do more to prevent toxic runoff and restore the damage it has caused. This year we will accelerate the cleanup work funded by our surface water management program.

In the Green River Valley, we averted the immediate threat of flooding from the damaged Howard Hanson Dam. This year I will work with all partners to develop a comprehensive solution for the whole river – to coordinate and unite our work on flood protection, economic development, and federally mandated salmon recovery – to leverage these major and sometimes competing efforts and create real, sustainable solutions, rather than simply pushing the problems downstream.

Our legacy of parks, natural lands, and trails must be kept clean, safe and open. This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of King County Parks – Your Big Backyard. Based on the recommendations of the task force we convened last summer, I will soon send the Council a proposal for placing renewal of the King County Parks Levy on the ballot this year. What we do now will say a lot about what happens in the next 75 years.

We set an ambitious goal nearly a decade ago for King County to protect 200,000 acres of forests. We've made great progress, and I am pleased to report that we expect this year to achieve that goal, helping to keep the most populous county in the Evergreen State, forever green.

Our agricultural production ranks third among all counties in Western Washington. Our farmland protection programs have helped local farmers markets multiply, from nine in 1999 to 41 today. Sales are up ten-fold, to \$30 million per year. The public clearly loves to eat locally.

But the face of agriculture is changing. Farms are smaller than they were 50 years ago, but there are more of them. Today millions of urban and suburban residents can select from a vast array of local fruits and vegetables, and locally-produced cheese and ciders. And, if that's not enough for you, there are 80 wineries and tasting rooms in Woodinville alone.

But we must do more. We must set for ourselves the twin goals of protecting more farmland before it gets paved over forever, and strengthening our support for the dynamic agriculture industry that is growing in King County. These are goals on which I will work with the Council and our community partners this year – but in the meantime, we can all do our part by choosing foods (and beer, wine and spirits!) produced here King County.

And who knows? The voter mandate to legalize marijuana may soon put a new spin on what it means to grow "high-value agricultural products."

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The third key to our prosperity is the **BUILT infrastructure**. Our parents and grandparents had the vision and will to create a great metropolitan region, and left it to us as their legacy.

The overriding challenge around the built environment is transportation. Our region did its part to save transit – with an unprecedented agreement to set aside old geographic formulas and boost transit productivity. The public did its part – with an outpouring of support for transit. The Council did its part – you saved bus service with the temporary authority granted by the Legislature.

Now it is time for the Legislature to do its part. If not, we will again face the grim certainty of slashing bus service by 17 percent, negatively impacting four of every five bus riders. The bus system is the workhorse of our transportation system, providing 115 million passenger trips last year. If the buses come to a halt, the roadways come to a halt –and our economy doesn't work.

Our County road system is a \$40 Billion investment in our built infrastructure. If stretched in a line it's enough roadway to take us from here to Kansas City – and we're watching it fall to pieces. Smaller roads are at risk of being turned back into gravel, because the revenues authorized by the state provide only a fraction of what it takes just to maintain the system. Many of our cities face similar challenges.

Growth management is succeeding in King County. We're getting urban areas inside cities. The funding system for local roads that preceded growth management needs to recognize this new reality.

We all know what needs to be done. With our city partners we have agreed on a proposal for transit and roads. We are united, and all of us who care about quality of life and the

economic health of this region – fully half the economy of the entire state – should insist on a permanent solution from the Legislature.

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I've outlined an ambitious agenda for our human, natural, and built infrastructure. But much of this work merely protects and sustains what we already have.

For example, the transit funding we seek in Olympia is a heavy lift – but it only preserves existing service. In 2013 we expect more people than ever in the history of Metro Transit to ride our buses. Not only must we keep our service, we must grow it to move an additional one million people expected in central Puget Sound in the next 30 years.

Our leading employers have told us they need two things to create the jobs of the 21st century – long-term investment in education, and immediate investment in transportation. Yet for 40 years this region and this state have systematically disinvested in our infrastructure and institutions.

Our funding for public schools was once sixth in the nation. Today we've fallen to 30th, 10 percent below the national average. Our funding for roads has fallen nine percent in just four years.

A lot of people have tried to fix the revenue system in this state. They've tried commissions and roundtables. It's nearly impossible to get a serious conversation started at the state capitol around this. I know. I was there. So were many of you.

But past generations took responsibility for the world they would leave to others. They invested in our land, our structures, and our people. These investments created the conditions for the prosperity we have enjoyed. In turn, that prosperity is what has paid for the infrastructure of our human, natural and built environments.

The evidence is here in this museum. Century 21 – the Seattle World's Fair. The optimism it fueled led our forebearers to call for major public investment. They called it Forward Thrust. Well, Century 21 has arrived. Where is the Forward Thrust for the 21st century?

We are all beneficiaries of that forward-looking, can-do spirit. And we are stewards of their legacy. But as stewards, we must do better.

It no longer makes sense to finance our 21st century future with 19th century tools. We are not serving the people well if we're not leveling with them about what it takes to pave the roads or save the buses or educate the next generation.

We have been blessed here with the enormous advantages of our human, natural, and built infrastructure – advantages that leave us no excuse for failure. But this is a fact: if we fail to invest in our infrastructure, if we fail to invest in our future, we are going fail. You know it, and I know it. There are no simple fixes here, but you and I—and leaders throughout our state— were elected to fix things.

And we have another advantage. At King County we have put ourselves in a position to take on these fundamental challenges. We did what we said we would do. We've reformed how we deliver services. We're changing how government works. Through rigor, collaboration, innovation and a commitment to reform we are remaking how the public's government operates. We should be able to apply that same approach to the question of how public services are financed.

This museum reminds us that, when faced with challenges, past generations pushed through barriers. They arrived at regional consensus. They drove an ambitious agenda and accomplished great things.

We know what we must do: relieve overcrowded classrooms, ensure higher educational access and excellence, fix crumbling roads and bridges, maintain and expand transit, and preserve and restore our natural heritage.

And just as happened before – business and labor, conservation and civic leadership are uniting around these urgent needs. It is all of you who are here today who will help make that difference.

Together, from our strong foundation of reform and partnership, we can move forward boldly to keep the state of the county, and of this region, strong – for every person, every family, in every community – for now, and for the future.

This morning this space we are borrowing will be filled with schoolchildren, eager to learn about local history. They are our future. Let them not say of us, 50 years from now: "Why didn't we build it?"

We can do it. Our history shows us that we can.

Thank you for your partnership and commitment.

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