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WHATCOM VIEW

County helping construct climate-friendly economy

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Throughout Whatcom County, people are stepping up to the challenge of climate change.

From the Whatcom County Courthouse and Bellingham City Hall to Western Washington University's campus, from the BP refinery and Alcoa Intalco Works to local fields and homes, they will help Washington find answers to this threat to our economy, environment and quality of life.

Together, we will build an economy that is based on clean energy, on sustainable practices, and on highly efficient transportation and energy production.

This new, green economy means independence and opportunity for Washington. It is the future.

We don't have to tell you that regular unleaded gas is selling for \$3.55 and more a gallon in Whatcom County. And there's no end in sight.

Now, imagine freeing ourselves from dependence on \$4- or \$5-a-gallon gas.

Imagine the freedom and opportunity that come with producing more power at your home or business than you consume, allowing you to sell power back to the grid.

Far-fetched? Not at all. Already, people and businesses in Washington can watch the dials on their power meters spin backward because of the energy that they produce through solar or other means.

Already, we lead the world in producing biofuels that provide a sustainable substitute for petroleum products. Whole Energy Fuels in Bellingham is supplying biodiesel for a rapidly growing market across the Pacific Northwest.

Already, Weyerhaeuser has teamed with Chevron to develop cellulosic ethanol made from what we currently throw away — garbage, wood waste, agricultural wastes and other materials.

We will lead the world in producing cellulosic ethanol, creating thousands of new, green jobs and revitalizing the forest products and agricultural industries.

Some still debate the causes of climate change. But the world's best scientists, after years of research, agree that climate change is happening, and that contributions from human activity is a factor.

We believe the scientists. In the past three years, we have had more than two dozen state emergency proclamations for the damage done by droughts, wildfires, floods and windstorms. That's an amazing, sobering number.

Regardless of what one believes about the causes of climate change, it makes sense to reduce our use of fossil fuels.

Our reliance on fossil fuels causes so much suffering — from their impact on our air and water to instability and war in the Middle East. We believe it is our generation's moral obligation to do what we can to protect our planet and our economy, too.

We could, as some suggest, sit back and wait to see whether and how this new economy develops. That's a losing strategy.

Washington can't wait — and we can't move slowly, either. Only a few states and countries are now competing for the facilities, the employers, the intellectual and financial leaders who will create this new green economy.

We're proud to say that we are one of those leadership states. Recently we, along with strong majorities in the House and Senate, enacted HB 2815. This Climate Action and Green-Collar Jobs legislation gives us a clear path to a winning strategy — a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Washington State and keep us at the forefront of an exciting future.

This bill is comprehensive, it demands results, and it is realistic.

Our goals for emission reductions are now a plan for real limits on greenhouse gas pollution.

The state's largest emitters must report those emissions to our state Department of Ecology starting with 2009 emissions.

About half of Washington's carbon emissions are caused every time we turn the ignitions in our cars. Our state Department of Transportation will recommend ways to reduce transportation emissions by looking at vehicle miles traveled — and will consider the consequences of those strategies. We aren't limiting individual freedom; we're setting important and necessary goals for our state and its future.

We have laid important groundwork so we can develop "green-collar" jobs for Washingtonians who will make good livings by helping us become a greener, cleaner state.

The business and environmental communities, and so many other interest groups, helped Washington get where we are today. Whatcom County has been well represented. Our Climate Advisory Team included Mike Rousseau of Alcoa Intalco Works; Bill Kidd of BP; Rep. Kelli Linville, a Democrat; and Rep. Doug Ericksen, a Republican.

We don't think you will find another state that can match what we've done together — the Washington way.

Chris Gregoire is governor of Washington. Kelli Linville represents the 42nd Legislative District in the state House of Representatives.