

EDITORIAL

Curiouser and Curiouser

BrainstormNW January 2006

Gov. Christine Gregoire and Gov. Ted Kulongoski have delivered their visions for the future. Gregoire spoke at an October leadership conference, “Competing in a Flat World: How “The Northwest” Can Succeed in an Integrated Global Economy.” Kulongoski presented his on a web page.

Gregoire spoke of the importance of the state’s creative class. Kulongoski announced that Oregon was the Innovation State. Both acknowledged that having a growing creative class in *not an economic panacea by itself*.

Gregoire remarked: “Richard Florida writes in the current *Atlantic Monthly*... the bulk of innovation is happening in cities that attract a critical mass of talented, creative people, or ‘peaks’ as he calls them. This causes their economies to develop at a much faster pace than more spread out, rural areas, or ‘valleys.’ He says that while the world may look flat to some, it’s mostly because the economic and social distance between the ‘peaks’ have become smaller. Not because the prosperity of the flat world is being distributed equally.”

Kulongoski announced that Oregon should promote entrepreneurship and invest in human capital to allow us to compete in the global marketplace.

Gregoire stated, “Our first job together is to build the right infrastructure. ...we need to make up for long-ignoring some major transportation problems. We need to make our roads and highways safe and provide for better movement of goods and services.” She then went out and passed a gas tax increase to fund her programs and successfully defended against a citizen initiative.

Kulongoski announced that Oregon should invest in Oregon’s multi-modal transportation infrastructure, including roads, bridges, ports, airports and railways, to allow businesses to decrease time to market for their goods. He then went out and did nothing.

Gregoire’s calls for more freight mobility “...Our ports are major economic engines, and key partners in our shared vision of trade. One of the best ways to build on our vibrant trade economy is to improve the shipment of goods and services here in our region.”

Kulongoski has been listless in moving the dredging of the Columbia River Channel.

Gregoire calls for “...education reform...when we evaluate the educational system in our own state, we shouldn’t compare it 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, the top schools in India.”

Kulongoski has called for the development of a sustainable pre-K-20 education system that is second to none. He has supported one of the biggest education fiascos of our time, CIM and CAM, and has failed to provide any leadership on stable school funding.

So how does Gregoire support the state's creative class in the global economy? With a short checklist: 1) roads, 2) ports, and 3) competitive schools. Globalization is about movement, and this governor is on the move.

How does Kulongoski respond? With bromides about the state's wonderful quality of life, new labels such as the Innovation State, and changing the state's slogan to "We Love Dreamers."

Like her programs or hate them, the principal distinction between Gregoire and Kulongoski is *action*. The effects are significant. As Gregoire noted in her speech, "On my trade mission to Asia, we flew in on a Boeing plane, drove past a skyscraper owned by Microsoft, and arrived at a hotel to enjoy a Starbucks coffee."

Both Gregoire and her neighbor to the south, Kulongoski, are worried about reelection, but their approaches to winning a second term are opposite, and are indicative of the future—hopeful for Washington and scary for Oregon.

Christine Gregoire was elected governor of Washington state in November of '04, which was noteworthy because in the first two machine ballot counts, Republican Dino Rossi led and appeared to have won (this was a big deal in Washington, because as with Oregon, a Republican had not been elected governor since the early '80s). It was only when hand counting began and "extra" voters were found in heavily Democrat King county that the election went to Gregoire. In our January editorial, which was reprinted in the Vancouver *Columbian*, we charged Gregoire with arguably stealing the election. Few have begun their term in office under worse (or more questionable) circumstances than Christine Gregoire did last January.

But Gregoire decided that to win reelection she would have to govern all of Washington, not just King County, though she arguably owes her election, as does Kulongoski, to the state's largest and most liberal county.

Regardless of your politics or how you won the office, there is a job description for the governor of Washington: keep the state in the forefront of the world economy. Currently Washington trades \$35 billion dollars worth of goods annually, while Oregon trades only \$11 billion. Gregoire's first year vision consists of some pretty concrete steps. Passing a gas tax (and making it stand up to a voter recall effort) to improve roads, adding two four-year universities (UW Tacoma, and WSU Vancouver), and building a third bridge across the Columbia for the 400,000 residents of Clark County.

While the governor of Washington moves to strengthen an already decent infrastructure, Oregon, with a far weaker infrastructure (tax system, higher-ed, transportation), makes no moves.

In a recent television interview, former Oregon governor John Kitzhaber hesitated when asked to name an accomplishment of Kulongoski's first term. Kitzhaber finally settled on the governor's attendance at the funeral services of Oregon soldiers killed in the Iraq war. All Oregonians are grateful to our Oregon soldiers and grateful for Kulongoski's efforts to comfort the families of the war dead. But this is not a job description.

No one is speaking for Oregon's role in the world economy. Keep in mind that Gregoire faces many of the same political pressures from King County that Kulongoski faces from Multnomah County. King County has its share of no-growth, "stop-the-world I want to get off-progressives," of bicycle fanatics, greenies, and slow-paced "light rail" enthusiasts. But their vision is not Gregoire's vision. She has a larger vision that looks out for all Washingtonians. We wish the same were true for Oregon.

With such a leadership crisis in Oregon, it is curious that Ted Kulongoski is still thought by many to be a solid favorite for reelection.