

Hydrogen Symposium Remarks

The zero emission pathway runs through local communities. We cannot meet our carbon reduction goals without engaging, in a meaningful way, at the local level. As the mayor of one small city on the hydrogen highway, I want to share with you what the view is from ground level as we develop a hydrogen hub and a renewable energy economy here in Lewis County.

Let me start by providing a little context, especially for those of you who aren't familiar with our area.

Hope is the #1 predictor of whether or not we flourish in life. A community that believes in a shared vision of the future, believes that it can secure the resources necessary to bring that vision to life, has the ability to figure out the steps to get there and the determination to achieve its goals is a community that will flourish. That is collective hope. Collective hope exists in every communal success story, whether it is a team, an organization, a city or Lewis County. Without hope, anger, despair and apathy take root and fester.

Lewis County's vision of creating a hydrogen valley is a vision of collective hope. For a long time, Lewis County has felt embattled through the loss of the timber industry and unemployment grew to 13% during the great recession. The TransAlta coal mine shut down, then the first coal-fired unit in 2020. Lewis County rebounded but then we had a pandemic. Right now, our annual average wage is only 65% of the State's. (\$48,214/\$73,504). 12% of people in Lewis County live in poverty – 16% in Centralia. Only 19% of residents (25 and older) have a bachelors' degree or higher, compared with 37% of people in WA State. Here in Lewis County, we highly value technical and trade training and education, so many people without a degree here are highly skilled workers. What we want and need, however, are jobs for our college students to come back to if they want to return home. So, when we talk about creating economic opportunity based on renewables, this isn't something in our "nice to have" column. We have a sense of urgency and purpose to help our residents thrive.

Our vision is rooted in the 4 Es – the environment, economy, education and equity.

Let's start with the economy. This discussion has to be rooted in the people the economy is intended to benefit. And for us, that is the people of Lewis County.

We don't want a path to zero emissions that roars through like I5, giving people fast access through here and leaving little more than pollution. Our renewable energy economy is intended to benefit the grandfather who worked in the timber industry in Packwood but has watched his kids struggle to find work in east Lewis County. They're a tight family, they want to stay close, but need jobs that don't exploit the environment and waste it for future generations. And the bistro owners on HWY 6 near Pe Ell who serve amazing Mediterranean dishes to travelers. They do all right, but would be helped so much by a local economy that can support them. The young electrician with a small family who wants to be home to read to his kids before bed, but needs a job with benefits here locally rather than traveling to wherever his out-of-state company sends him next. And the high school student who loves science and right now knows she's going to have to live away from home if she wants to pursue her science career. The renewable energy economy is intended to create jobs for the full spectrum of workers. And, the ability to produce and distribute hydrogen locally creates opportunities for us to have those jobs located in multiple locations in Lewis County. This economy cannot be built on the backs of our workers without benefiting them. We are aiming to generate more jobs, higher wages, more variety of jobs, and tax dollars that can be funneled back into the job creation pipeline. And I believe we will do it.

The environment is next. We have watched as major metropolitan areas have paved over and developed majority percentages of their environment. Hiking or skiing off I90 often requires an hour to find a parking place before you can get out and enjoy the peaceful beauty of nature with hundreds of your closest friends.

😊 The vast majority of Lewis County is still green space. Drive any direction out of town and in 5 minutes you can be on a winding country road. We have a bounty of water here in the Chehalis Basin. We want to not only preserve our environment but restore it. The reclamation work being done right now at TransAlta is an inspiration. For a long time, many of the ideas for economic development were based on the idea of large expanses of cheap land. The hydrogen valley is focused on green hydrogen, and the zero emission pathway requires the development of a variety of alternative energy sources. Every smoke season, unnatural heat dome, atmospheric river that dumps obscene amounts of rain gives me chills about the future we're leaving our children. We absolutely must invest in developing alternative energy.

When it comes to the zero emission pathway, education is key. Yes, this is about creating educational opportunities to develop and train workers for this new economy. I am confident that we can do that. We have the Center of Excellence for Clean Energy located right here, serving the region but headquartered in Centralia. We have high schools with excellent STEM programs and vocational opportunities. The SW WA Flexible Training Center is right over there. We just need to make sure we're including our east and west county students in these opportunities. But education also means community education. We have worked extremely hard to inform the public and educate our local communities about hydrogen, renewable energy and the intersection of the economy and environment. You all know, there is a lot of noise out there when it comes to this topic. And misinformation and criticism. I'm here to tell you that our local Energy Innovation Coalition visited each of the nine cities and towns and multiple other organizations to talk about this effort. Boy, do you learn a lot when you sit on an uncomfortable folding chair on a weeknight, listening to the local city council sort through its business and then talking with you. It is time-consuming and well worth it. We were universally received with curiosity, interest and support for our efforts. There were a lot of questions about hydrogen specifically and the economic benefits. A little education goes a long way, but it is outreach-based, not sitting and waiting for someone to watch our webinar.

We created a coalition of people representing education, government and private sector organizations. We visited all 9 cities and towns in Lewis County. As we traveled from Pe Ell to Morton, we found people to be curious, supportive and enthusiastic about the possibilities. We learned there is a multitude of renewable energy projects already happening across the 2,400 square miles that is Lewis County today. We have had people call us and ask to be a part of this work, and others offer resources we didn't even know existed here in the community. We introduced the collective impact framework as a model for bringing all of these disparate efforts together to benefit the residents here in Lewis County, without taking away the autonomy of each individual organization.

If equity is defined as access to opportunity, access to resources, networks and supports, then we want this vision of an economic renaissance to create equitable access for our workforce, our students and the rural environment we value so highly. We need to be creating opportunities for people in Onalaska, Oakville and Randle, as well as right here in my city. This economy cannot be built on the backs of our workers without benefiting them. It cannot be built by laying waste to the

rivers, forests, wildlife that we live in and near. And it cannot be built without creating a path for our current and future students to have a way forward to good jobs that are sustainable for generations to come.

For a long time, it seemed as if we were always on the cusp of a better economy that never materialized. Oh, we're halfway between Seattle and Portland – people will want to locate here! Oh, we have a lot of land – people will want to locate here! Oh, we have a small town cuteness – people will want to locate here! And, while some did, the “next big thing” was always a coming attraction but never actually on the marquee. We were waiting, preparing, anticipating, but not DOING. Now, we have moved from hitching our wagon to someone else's star to taking the reins ourselves. We've put ourselves in the driver's seat and we're leading. The view locally is optimistic and hopeful, but required us to invite people to our table rather than waiting for someone to pull the chair out at theirs.

Each of you are here today for your own reasons. We're brought together by a shared interest in hydrogen. I have no doubt that Washington is an emerging hydrogen hub and each of you have a role to play in it. I have a two requests for you, as we explore these possibilities together.

My first request is this: in your actions and decisions, consider Lewis County and those of us who live here. We want you to be successful and we want to partner with you. We want to share what we've learned so you can benefit too. But don't take more from us than you give. Be equitable in your planning and choices. Protect our environment, our workforce and our economy. I know, that isn't the straight up capitalism model where competition is king, but our planet is getting smaller every day. We need to care about each other's success to sustain our own success. Be a part of our community and a part of our future.

My second request is this: wherever your home community is, seek to be a part of the coalition for change there. How are you contributing to your local community? We wouldn't be here, in this wonderful symposium today, without our local leaders making a difference. We also couldn't be here without you. If there are ways we can inspire you to build collective hope wherever home is for you, we want to do that too.

I'm going to close with a story for you. This is the true story of the founder of Centralia. His name is George Washington. He was born in 1817, the son of a slave and an English woman. His parents allowed a white couple to adopt him in order for him to escape a life of slavery. When he was 33, he left Virginia and started traveling west to find a better life and more opportunity. The color of his skin meant he encountered barrier after barrier, but the determination in his heart led him to keep going. Over and over he would find a place to settle and start to make a life for himself, only to be prevented from buying and owning land. Over and over, he pushed further west. Finally, he came here to the banks of the Skookumchuck and Chehalis confluence. He was still unable to purchase land, but his adopted parents had traveled with him and he bought land in their names. When the laws changed, they gave it back to him to put in his name. He eventually married a woman named Mary Jane. The two of them donated the land to start Centralia, platting it out over their kitchen table. They donated land for a church, a cemetery and a school. Racism persisted, and at one point George left his home church because it was too difficult for some of the congregants to worship with a black man. He was poisoned once. Yet when the Panic of 1893 hit and the town nearly collapsed economically, George was the one who held it together. He floated people mortgages he was owed, drove to Portland to load up on food and living supplies and distributed them throughout the town. When he died, the entire town of 5,000 took a day of mourning to honor him. George's story is one of determination, resilience, generosity and hope. He had a vision for a town where people could live and prosper and he made it happen. As we work to build an economy out of renewable energy, let us emulate George Washington – let us be determined, resilient, generous and hopeful. Let's not leave anyone behind with our success, but lay the foundation for a bright future.

10:00 AM – 11:00
AM

The Zero-Emission Pathway

10:00 AM – 10:20 AM Washington State's Zero-Emission Transition Plan and Carbon-Reduction Goals | Glenn Blackmon, Energy Policy Office Manager, WA Department of Commerce

10:20 AM – 10:40 AM PNW Hydrogen Association Update | Brian Young, Director of Economic Development for the Clean Energy Sector, WA Department of Commerce

10:40 AM – 11:00 AM Equity, Environment, Education and Economy | Kelly Smith Johnston, Mayor, the City of Centralia