

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

County's new college should be located north of Everett

By John Koster

Special to The Times

The facts are clear. We need a four-year college in Snohomish County — one that focuses on math and the sciences, a polytechnical college.

As a state representative in the late 1990s, I helped draft legislation to study where in the state were the greatest needs for higher-education facilities. We knew then that siting more colleges and vocational schools would be a requirement to ensure and protect our children's futures. Snohomish County's current population of 670,000 is projected to be nearly 1 million residents by 2025 — a short 18 years from now. Snohomish County is currently the largest county in the U.S. without a four-year higher-education institution. Now is the time to remedy that.

Moreover, our supply of engineers in all fields is so inadequate that neither the public nor the private sector can fill all their engineering vacancies, not to mention the growing need for health-care professionals.

The state is planning a branch site for the University of Washington in North Puget Sound. The governor says this campus should focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We need a four-year polytechnical college in North Snohomish County.

The governor's task force is seeking the right location for this four-year college, which is to serve the citizens of Island, Skagit, and Snohomish counties. Finding the right site should be based on our citizens' needs and good, practical common sense. It should not be based on politics. The location must fulfill the intent of legislation, not cave to pressures from local politicians seeking the economic windfall that a new college may bring.

The selected site must be readily accessible for all students from the three-county service area. The site must be transit-friendly and commuter-friendly. The site must have room for future growth.

The two Everett sites under consideration make no sense. One is an industrial site requiring costly cleanup with no room for future campus growth, and the other is in the floodplain.

The only sites that make practical common sense to consider are those located north of Everett. Only a North Snohomish County site can provide student accessibility, transit service and room for growth. A north county location will serve everyone in the three-county service area. Building at any site south of Marysville will run commuting students into the midst of already heavy traffic.

Without an easily accessible, affordable, centrally located north county college, our citizens may not have the opportunity to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge needed to build their tomorrow. This is an outcome we cannot tolerate.

John Koster is a member of the Snohomish County Council. A Republican, he serves District 1, which includes cities ranging from Marysville to Granite Falls to Stanwood.