

EXECUTIVE KREMEN'S TRIP TO D.C.

County Executive Pete Kremen held two lengthy interviews this weekend with a PLIC Board representative, during which Kremen said, "I'll be on the ferry on April 11!" A summary of his week-long trip to Washington, D.C., and actions since returning:

He met last Friday in Washington, D.C., with the chair of the Lummi Indian Business Council (LIBC), Cliff Cultee arranged prior to their departures to D.C. (Results below.) Cultee and other LIBC representatives were making rounds with the Washington state Congressional delegates. Kremen was attending a national conference of county government leaders, and he also met with Congressman Rick Larsen (WA-Dem) and Sen. Maria Cantwell (WA-Dem), and with Sen. Patty Murray's (WA-Dem) staff, for discussions about the ferry situation.

Kremen learned from the Congressional delegates' staffs that LIBC had hired a public relations firm about 3 weeks ago. One theme of the p-r campaign has been a flood of documents and statements, and meetings with Congressional delegates and media (e.g., Bellingham Herald editorial board), all directed at a central message:

That the County has continually, not just in recent months but for years, ignored the Lummi Nation's requests for transportation safety improvements -- especially as they are associated with the County's ferry operation at Gooseberry Point and the county road Haxton Way through the reservation to the ferry dock.

To which Kremen replies, "That's simply not the case."

[Public Works provided documentation of nearly \$7.5 million spent for road and transportation initiatives on Lummi Nation during the last 15 years.]

"While in Washington, D.C., and since then, I discovered that Lummi Nation is disseminating a great deal of information about their traffic and safety concerns and willfully misrepresenting the facts," Kremen said. "I find that extremely disappointing. They are making an already difficult issue even more difficult with distorted information."

As a result, Kremen and County Attorney Dan Gibson undertook making comments in a point-by-point analysis of a Time Line distributed widely by LIBC.

For example, LIBC stated that on May 10, 2010, LIBC and Whatcom County negotiated a deal and then reneged on it when County Council voted it down. In a nutshell: The negotiating team representing County at that session, including Council chair Sam Crawford, was not authorized to seal a deal. They could only take the terms to County Council for approval or rejection, which they did, and Council rejected it. (Even the LIBC's own Time Line qualifies, "...pending approval by respective councils....")

"We made it crystal clear to LIBC that, while we would take the terms they presented to Council for consideration," Kremen said, "we felt strongly that we had no chance for approval by the Council -- possibly not even on the \$200,000 annual payment, let alone the \$8 million (which now they have raised to \$10 million)."

As a result of the information disseminated by the Lummi Nation's p-r campaign, Kremen requested county staff and officials to gather and provide documentation that refuted many of the statements germane to Lummi Nation's claims, including ignoring their traffic, transportation, and road safety concerns. Kremen said, "They are showing fallacious information, willfully misleading the Congressional delegation, media, and the general public."

During his session of 45 minutes or more with Cultee, Kremen said he made a couple of general proposals as a way to regenerate negotiations. "We've taken seriously Lummi Nation's requests for traffic safety improvements," Kremen said. "I told him to relay to the LIBC, in order to get us back to the bargaining table, that we would consider front-loading the \$200,000 we offered over the next 15 years or so -- whatever it would take to get the sidewalks and projects he thinks are immediately imperative for safety. His reply?

"That's the same money you were going to give us anyway."

"So I said, OK, let's put that aside and how about this: What if we were willing to placing flashing crosswalk signs down by the ferry wherever they'd be most beneficial -- those have been proven very effective -- and also two flashing speed-limit signs up along Haxton Way. That would cost the County from \$75,000 to \$100,000 for the crosswalk flashing sign, and about \$40,000 for the flashing speed signs, a generous \$125,000-140,000 sign of good faith to get us talking again.

"He said, 'I'll think about it.'"

Kremen added, "I told the entire Congressional delegation and repeated to Chairman Cultee, we are going to keep that ferry running from Gooseberry Point to Lummi Island, come April 11. And I'll be on it...."