



## **Commissioner Courtney Gregoire Opening Statement:**

### **February 11, 2014 Quality Jobs Hearing**

At our first meeting of the year, this Commission laid out our clear priorities for 2014 including: maintaining our seaport's competitiveness, selecting new executive leadership for the Port and strengthening middle-class jobs throughout our region.

Today we embark on our first policy hearing – focused on the important work of supporting and sustaining quality jobs across Port facilities. The Port of Seattle has long been dedicated to supporting the creation of good-paying family wage jobs. From fishing to international trade, tourism to the longshore industry, the Port serves as a true economic engine supporting 200,000 jobs in our regional economy.

But our region and our nation face a significant challenge. By all measures, middle class jobs are eroding. The inequality gap – which threatens our nation's competitiveness and economic security – is widening.

Our country was founded on the fundamental promise of opportunity. That a short-order cook can aspire to own her own café (maybe even in an airport). That through hard work, individuals can pull themselves into a growing middle class.

That promise is in question today. For too many workers, the path to the middle class has been blocked. And, we know this situation doesn't just hurt individuals, it challenges families, communities, and opportunities for future generations.

This is the challenge that we all face – how do we stitch back together the fundamental promise of opportunity and leave our community better for future generations?

*What role can the Port of Seattle play?* A unique one. In 1911, the voters of King County charged the Port of Seattle with becoming good stewards of public assets – ensuring that harbor facilities were managed for the benefit of all citizens not just a privileged few. That responsibility extends to all Port of Seattle property from Fisherman's Terminal to SeaTac International Airport – and it is a responsibility we take very seriously.

Today, we start a process to examine what it means to work at these facilities and to explore opportunities to strengthen our community fabric across the region. We start by gathering data to make informed decisions, and to hear from the individuals behind that data.

- We seek to hear from current employees about their experiences – positive and negative about working at the airport
- We seek to hear from employers about opportunities and challenges of operating at an airport, and about their policies to recruit and retain a qualified workforce
- And, we seek to hear about broader operational issues and existing workforce development programs.

So, what data do we already have? Today, every single one of our Port of Seattle employees makes \$15/hour – with the lone exception of some high school and college students who apply for our temporary internship program. Just as importantly, 100% of our employees have access to job training, career counseling and an opportunity for tuition assistance to help prepare them for career advancement.

The Port of Seattle is committed to ensuring quality jobs for not only the 1800 Port of Seattle employees, but also the 15,000 employees contracted by our vendors and business partners who work full or part-time at Sea-Tac Airport – and our other facilities.

We want to make sure that the 35 million travelers coming through our airport annually have great service, experience local Northwest sounds and tastes, and affordable prices. We want our airport to be a home for small and local businesses to expand and thrive. And, we will move forward with our ambitious \$1 billion expansion plan that will support Sea-Tac as the fastest growing international hub on the West Coast, family construction jobs in the short term and bringing millions more travelers and business opportunities to the region.

We sincerely appreciate the presenters who have accepted our invitation to be here today and share their perspectives. As we have said, we plan to have additional hearings as we consider policies to support quality jobs at all Port facilities. At those, we hope to hear from regional leaders on issues of job quality and workforce development. We also plan to consider the information being gathered by Mayor Murray's efforts – expected in late March/early April. And, we hope to hear from leaders in other regions who have considered innovative approaches to address inequality.

And, for those who would like to provide written comments – please do so through [QUALITYJOBS@PORTSEATTLE.ORG](mailto:QUALITYJOBS@PORTSEATTLE.ORG).