

Port of Seattle Leadership Team
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Dear Port of Seattle Leadership,

My name is Jordan Van Voast, I am the co-President of the Dharma Friendship Foundation, co-founder of CommuniChi Acupuncture clinic, volunteer teaching meditation at King County Corrections, and active in international disaster relief.

Thirty years ago, I was paddling a kayak alone in Glacier Bay. A cruise ship passed in the distance and minutes later, my kayak bobbed up and down through the wake. It was an otherwise flat calm sea and moments later, I came upon a dragonfly, upside down and drowning. Why was that dragonfly, a creature with 300 million years on the planet and a master of flight drowning? The answer was obvious. Millions of years of evolution hadn't prepared it for cruise ship waves.

So what? Just an insect, right? But it's much more than that. Our commodification and separation from nature is melting the glaciers, harming the whales, salmon, bears, and forests. It is resulting in acid rain, toxic sludge, prop noise, broken treaties, island nations disappearing underwater, and carbon cooking the planetary atmosphere. Capitalism's singular quest for profits, does not see or respect our interconnectedness. Our failure to listen to nature will be our downfall unless we wake up and listen to the wisdom in our hearts. My story does not end here though. In a moment of inspiration, I gently lifted the dragonfly out of the water and held it in my hand, imagining its tiny heart beating. A gentle breeze was blowing across the bay and in time, its wings were dry. An inner voice told me to throw it upwards into the sky, so I did, and I watched it fly straight up and out of sight, towards the old growth forest.

The resurrection of that dragonfly represents the possibility of resurrecting life on Earth in balance. We can do that if we work together, but there's not much time. The Doomsday clock is

literally at two minutes to midnight.¹ Suggested first step: Stop sugar coating reality with policy language like the Century Agenda. We need to decrease cruise traffic and air traffic, not increase it. Please cancel the T46 cruise ship expansion project.

Expanding cruise traffic is inconsistent with any chance of our city and nation lowering its greenhouse gas emissions and meeting critical climate targets. How can we justify increasing our emissions for luxury travel and expect third world countries with much lower standards of living to reduce theirs? Where is the equity in that? I've read the marketing put out by the Port. And listened to your campaign statements expressing concerns about climate change. Certainly, credit is due for your efforts to electrify the waterfront, but as has been pointed out in public comments at Port meetings, electrifying the waterfront only amounts to .1% of the entire GHG emissions from a cruise. The grimy fossil fuel reality at present is that no magic technology exists to make cruise ships, or merchant vessels anything close to carbon free. Cancelling the T46 project is the morally and economically correct decision.

The Smith Cove Blue Carbon project would sequester approximately 8300 tons² of carbon under best case scenario. The annual carbon footprint of the Seattle cruise industry is several million tons when one factors in air travel before and after cruises, and that is poised to rise by 25 to 50% if T46 goes ahead, and the newer mega-class cruise ships with passenger capacities of over 7,000 passengers are welcomed to our city.

LNG fuels are not a climate solution according to the recent report from the International Maritime Organization, and will likely result in "stranded assets". Hydrogen fuel cell technology is talked about, but there is nothing to suggest this will appear anytime soon. Meanwhile, cruise companies are building giant vessels that will continue to increase emissions when we need to be radically cutting them. The climate science is clearcut, though imagining the extinction of all life on earth seems abstract enough that we can remain in denial. We do so at our peril. 97% of climate scientists agree that we have ten years to reduce emissions by fifty percent to have just a fifty percent chance of avoiding irreversible climate tipping points (i.e. going beyond 2 degrees C). Two centuries of global industrialization has already brought us to the brink of catastrophe. We've already baked in climate gases into the atmosphere which means carbon levels will continue to rise even if we achieved net zero emissions tomorrow. What part of this picture don't you understand?

My first job out of college was on a municipal bond trading desk in 1981 at Dean Witter Reynolds here in Seattle, just before the largest bond default in history. We all know the story of WPPSS, but do we remember the lessons?

¹ <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>

²

. One square kilometer (250 acres) of eel grass could conceivably sequester 83,000 tons of carbon. Smith Cove project is 25 acres. But will the eel grass survive long term? Kelp is dying in many parts of the world due to ocean warming.

"As a study in governance this would be a dull story if the causes of the fiasco were evil and greed. But not so. The officials who were trapped into these errors were men of idealism who lived out an ethic of public service. They got into this trouble by the same methods which had previously served them well. They had encountered a problem whose resolution required a change in basic assumptions – not just doing things better but doing different things – and that is hard for most people to do."³

Last August, The Port issued \$457 million dollars in bonds. That's a huge increase in borrowing over the past. Your bond rating of Moodys A1 is considered good. But remember, WPPSS was initially rated triple A. So what assumptions are at risk here? I think you know the answer to that question based upon what my colleagues and I have been saying here at the mic recently. But I'll summarize. Free market capitalism borrows against a future which is literally going up in flames. It's based on carbon and the laws of physics aren't going to allow that system to continue.

Looking back at the WPPSS debacle, there was a complete failure on the part of the bankers and elected officials to recognize the risks of growing public resistance to nuclear power. There are striking parallels today with our collective failure as a society to confront climate change. Jobs and economic development are important, but they need to be compatible with a healthy planet. That's why we need a Green New Deal – creating a decarbonized economy with a just transition for workers. That could be part of a revised charter for the Port, and it could come from within should the Port leadership heed the signs that Mother Earth is sending us now from Australia, the recent closure of the cod fishery in the Gulf of Alaska, the decimation of the Washington state shellfish industry, increasing forest fires, and droughts affecting farms in Eastern Washington.

Whether or not Chief Seattle actually uttered these words is irrelevant, they resonant with the teachings I have been fortunate enough to receive from indigenous elders who have lived in this area for over ten thousand years:

"This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."⁴

Thank you for listening. With prayers for future generations,



Jordan Van Voast

³ <https://www.context.org/iclib/ic07/myers/>

⁴ <http://www.csun.edu/~vcpsy00h/seattle.htm>

