

**Mayor's column for  
The Edmonds and the Mukilteo Beacon  
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A few weeks ago I was astounded to read an article in The Everett Herald that said the Snohomish County Republican Party had endorsed the expansion of passenger service at Paine Field. The party's 15-member executive committee voted unanimously to support the issue. The party chairman stated that, "The more commercial traffic, the more jobs you're going to have out there. Those are typically high-paying jobs." He followed up with, "There are times that you just have to take a stand on something that's good for the county, good for the entire community." Good for the *entire* community?

Then last week I was invited to a 21<sup>st</sup> District Republican meeting where the party chairman was the speaker. He had been invited by the group to give a presentation on why the executive committee made this decision. Being a local elected official, I'm nonpartisan, and my position does not require party affiliation; however, I was clearly interested in why a decision like this had been made. Maybe they knew something I didn't.

You see, for years now I've been asking anyone who suggests that adding commercial service at Paine Field will be an economic boom for Snohomish County to give me some hard evidence of that fact. I hear it will add jobs; show me how many and where. I hear it will bring new businesses to the county; give me names. I also hear that businesses are refusing to come here because it's too difficult to get from SeaTac to here and vice versa. Again I say, give me names of companies who won't come.

I've asked these questions of the Snohomish County Economic Development Council, of the Private Enterprise Coalition of Snohomish County, and of many others who say they want commercial flights out of Paine Field. No one yet has given me hard data to prove their case. I'm still waiting.

I can't help but believe that if an airline thought it could make money here, it would already be here. Maybe they're waiting for someone—Snohomish County, for example—to make them an offer they can't refuse. If that's the case, we're talking money! Taxpayer money! And I don't believe that the County Council would be willing to spend taxpayer money to bring an airline to Paine Field.

I also hear that it takes three hours to get to SeaTac from Lake Stevens, Snohomish, and other points north. That seems to be why there is such strong sentiment in north county to add commercial flights at Paine Field. While I can sympathize with the amount of time it takes to get to SeaTac, I also feel that the reason people have chosen to live in that part of the county is that they want the quality of life those cities provide. But they can't have it both ways. We chose to live here, in Edmonds, closer to SeaTac, which may not be as serene and pastoral as some areas of north Snohomish County, but this is our quality of life. What would commercial flights at Paine Field add to *our* quality of life?

But I digress! I went to the meeting looking for answers. Apparently many people there were looking for the same answers. The party chairman was almost apologetic. He didn't have answers for the economic benefit questions. He couldn't explain why the party didn't wait until the committee appointed by the County Executive had finished its study of the issue and made its report. He didn't think that any Republican candidates would be hurt by their decision despite the fact that the City Councils of Edmonds, Lynnwood, Mountlake Terrace, Mukilteo, and Woodway have passed resolutions against any expansion of commercial flights at Paine Field.

He also mentioned casually that the entire county was in favor of expansion except for the 21<sup>st</sup> District, mainly just Mukilteo. The only opposition to the idea in his mind was the Save Our Communities group—again, mainly just Mukilteo. Apparently he runs in different circles than I do.

At the end of the night, I walked away thinking that either he wasn't willing to share any economic data that the party's executive committee used to make its decision, or he just plain didn't have any. I'm convinced it was the latter. I have always believed that this expansion idea was being pushed by a few well-to-do north county folks. Now I'm even more convinced, and I guess they are well-to-do Republicans as well.

The statement that the only people who are opposed are the ones who live in a small south county area is very telling. Of course those folks are opposed—they are the ones who will have their quality of life affected so that the north county residents can keep their quality of life and not have to drive so far to an airport.

Big donors convinced the Republican Party executive committee to take this stand. This is an astonishing thing to do when a County Council seat is up for grabs that serves most of the people in the 21<sup>st</sup> District. If you live in the 21<sup>st</sup> and you are concerned about your quality of life due to Paine Field expansion, and the Republicans say they favor it, wouldn't that make you vote Democrat in the County Council race?

As neither a "D" nor an "R," I just don't get it. There was nothing to gain for the Republican Party to make this decision, and everything to lose, especially the County Council seat they have held for so long. I guess, in the end, money talks.