NCSL International Parliamentarians
Pritchard Building Café
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Welcome to Washington. We are very happy to have you here. Greeting visitors from other nations always provides me with a great opportunity to boast about our state, so please indulge me for a few moments while I talk about some of the wonderful opportunities for visitors that we have here in the Pacific Northwest. Please do not confuse us with Washington D.C., our nation's capital. That city is across the country, about 5,000 kilometers away!

Washington is a state of majestic beauty. We have two mountain ranges, the Cascades to our east and the Olympics to the northwest. You've no doubt seen our highest and most prominent peak, Mt. Rainier. It has more glaciers on it than any other in the contiguous United States (lower 48). There are many other peaks too, including our world famous volcano, Mount St. Helens, which blew its top just 35 years ago, reducing its height by 390 meters (1,280 feet). Fortunately ample warning limited the loss of life.

You may have seen parts of the Puget Sound too, especially from Seattle. It's very large and where a lot of us like to do activities like boating and fishing. We also have many impressive forests that serve a variety of recreational activities, like hiking and hunting, and have sustained commercial activities such as logging. The majority of our logs are exported to countries in Asia, especially Japan and China.

If you travel east of the Cascade Mountain range we have land that is nearly desert, vast expanses of crop land and endless hills where we plant wheat and vineyards. In case you are not aware, we produce some very highly-rated, premium wines in our state, comparable to any in the world. And our wineries are increasingly selling their products in the global marketplace. Washington is also a global economic power house. Perhaps some of you have enjoyed a cup of Starbucks coffee – Starbucks is also a global company based in Seattle. We are also home to many large companies like Microsoft, Amazon, Costco and a commercial aircraft company called Boeing. There are hundreds of other aerospace companies too, some suppliers to Boeing and others that are not tied to Boeing at all.

We are a gateway to Alaska, Canada and to Asia, so billions of dollars in products go through our ports each year. We are also a state of great diversity – more than 200 languages are spoken in our schools. We welcome that diversity but as you can imagine it also presents challenges to our educational system when over 17 percent of all school children do not speak English as their first language. With so much to offer, Washington state is a destination for tourists from all over the world. Many find their way to our state capital.

I hope you enjoyed your tour of our Capitol building this morning. I happen to believe –as do many others – that we have one of the most beautiful capitols of any state in the United States. At 287 feet it has the fifth-tallest masonry dome in the world.

We could never build something of this magnitude today – it would simply be too expensive. It cost $7 million to build back in the 1920s. Today our Capitol would cost more than $1 billion to build with the same materials and workmanship. We cherish our capitol and take great pride in showing it off, especially to international visitors like yourselves.

We had proof of how solidly the building was constructed in 2001 when an earthquake of 6.8 magnitude rattled this region. Being inside the Capitol was not very fun as it shook terribly. The dome was cracked and other parts of the building were damaged by the shaking, but it stood strong. In fact the building has also withstood two other major quakes since its construction in 1928, one in 1949 and another in 1965.

Following the quake in 2001, the Capitol was closed for three years both for repair and for renovations that were being planned anyway. As part of this project, 144 solar panels were placed on top of the fifth floor. That's the largest array of solar panels on a capitol building in the United States. By the way, we value alternative energy in our state. Most of our electricity comes from low-cost hydroelectric power but we also have huge wind farms and some nuclear energy.

Of course it's not how the Capital is built or what it costs that is really important. It is what goes on inside. First I would like to tell you about my role in the legislative process. The position of lieutenant governor, like the governor, falls within our executive branch of state government but in reality it also crosses into the legislative branch because of its legislative responsibilities.

If you went to the Senate chambers – and I trust you did – you saw the rostrum where I wield the gavel. It's my job to keep order and decorum in the Senate as legislation is debated on the floor. In the Washington State Senate they call this positon the president. The president does not vote except when there is a tie. In our House of Representatives, the position is called the speaker, as of course it is with most parliamentary governments. The lieutenant governor is also the acting governor whenever the governor sets foot out of state. That gives me all the powers of the governorship, including the signing of emergency orders which I have done a few times. (Devastating Oso landslide as example, killed 43 and wiped out dozens of homes last year).

Now I'd like to tell you a little about the current political stage here.

As you may know Washington state, as with the United States, is primarily made up of a two party system, the Republicans and Democrats, with the Republicans known as the more conservative party of the two. I say typically because there are a few Democrats who will vote with the Republicans, and Republicans who will side with the Democrats on certain issues. The state Legislature in Washington does not meet throughout the year. We meet 105 days in the odd-numbered years and just 60 days in the even years. The number of days can – and often are

– extended if there is disagreement on critical pieces of legislation, which most often is the state budget.

Our Senate is currently controlled by a Republican majority with one independent Democrat crossing ranks to join what they call the Majority Coalition Caucus. So the Republicans essentially have a voting majority of 26 votes to 23 Democratic votes in the 49-member upper chamber.

In the 98-member House, the Democrats make up a slender 51 to 47 majority. Our governor, Jay Inslee, is a Democrat. These numbers help explain why we had such a long legislative session this year. In fact we set a new record of meeting for 176 days including the three special sessions. That was mostly due to failure by members of the opposing political parties to agree on a state budget. An earlier Washington Supreme Court ruling on basic education left us with a $2 billion shortfall that had to be covered, and there were many disagreements on how to account for it.

The Democrats proposed to make up the difference with a tax increase and closing tax loopholes and the Republicans proposed reforms and budget cuts. In the end, loopholes were closed and no taxes were raised, but everyone, including the governor, had to give up something in order for the budget to pass. For instance, our governor, who ran for office on an environmental platform of preventing climate change, had to sacrifice his plan for a carbon emissions tax to raise revenue. As with all partisan political processes, there was a lot of digging in at first then, in the final days of the third session when there was a threat of state government having to shut down and lot of public pressure simply to get things done, the Legislature managed to pass a budget that everyone could live with and it went on to the governor's desk for signature.

Our budget debate is just one example. I understand you will spend a lot more time on legislative processes in your next session this afternoon so I will not go further into it unless there are questions at the end.

As this is an international group, I would describe some of the international relations work we do from our office.

I chair a legislative panel called the Legislative Committee on Economic Development and International Relations. This committee is made up of 12 legislators representing both parties and the House and Senate equally. The committee primarily looks at issues that have an impact on the economy of Washington state, such as tourism, energy, manufacturing and agriculture.

Later this fall we will look at the outer space industry. A number of companies with operations in Washington contract with NASA and contribute to private sector space endeavors. For example, a Washington-based team with a company called Aerojet Rocketdyne built the engines that powered NASA's New Horizons space craft all the way past Pluto a few weeks ago. One of our recent topics was to look at an investment program called EB-5 that rewards foreign

investors who also create jobs with permanent U.S. residency status for themselves and for their immediate families.

Over the years since taking office in 1996 I have lead more than 25 trade, cultural and educational missions outside the United States. Most of these have been to countries in Asia, but there have also been missions to Mexico, Brazil and Peru, to Germany, Spain, Hungary and Turkey.

We have been to mainland China and Taiwan many times and to Japan, Thailand, Korea, the Philippines and India at least once. I am delighted to see so many delegates from Canada in the audience as we as a state share so much with our neighbors to the north, especially with British Columbia. For the past few years since the announcement of the Beyond the Border initiative by the Obama and Harper administrations, we have been working on ways to move goods more securely and more quickly across our borders. Washington state has been a major participant in that initiative due to our proximity to Canada and the amount of cross-border trade that we do.

Washington state has a very active consular corps with consuls representing 41 nations. We work with these consuls throughout the year as they all have a strong interest in encouraging bilateral trade, tourism and friendly relations with the nations they represent. Ambassadors and other high-ranking dignitaries visit all of the time.

A couple of months ago I welcomed the King of Norway during his visit to Seattle and Tacoma. In my office hangs an ornate embroidery presented to me a few years ago by the first prime minister of Vietnam to visit the United States since our Vietnam War in the 1960s. It is my practice as lieutenant governor to treat all our international visitors with respect and, hopefully, leave them with a positive impression of our state and our people so that they will want to return.

I welcome the members of parliament from Germany. We have a rich German heritage in Washington, a very active German community in Seattle, the Bavarian-themed town of Leavenworth in our mountains and of course a large aerospace company founded by Bill Boeing, the son of a wealthy German mining engineer. Many of you flew in on a Boeing aircraft. Even though I was raised in Washington, I happen to be a graduate of Frankfurt American High School as my step-father served in the military there.

I am also delighted and honored to see so many government officials from China. China is Washington's largest trading partner. Washington has had a longtime friendship agreement with the Sichuan Province and many of our cities have sister city relationships with cities in China. Many Chinese companies have operations in Washington and have made long-term real estate investments with us. In addition there are several Councilors from the Taiwan Provincial Consultative Council and I would like to welcome you here too. The Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Seattle is a very active organization that represents the interests of Taiwan in a five-state region.

And such a large delegation from Kenya! While I have never been to the continent of Africa personally, Washington state has many strong ties to Kenya and Africa and we have a very active African chamber of commerce here. For instance, there is a small company in Washington that specializes in the production of fuel efficient charcoal cook stoves in Kenya, producing about 6,000 a month there and employing about 100 Kenyans. The Microsoft Corporation recently established one of its regional leadership centers in Kenya.

Welcome to the members of parliament from South Africa as well, a nation with which we also have many ties. In fact the South African Chamber of Commerce for South Africa's Seattle chapter is putting on its second annual South African Marketplace event this October, and is organizing a trade trip to Johannesburg in September. I see that we have the nations of Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, Morocco and The Congo with representation here too. We want you to feel very much at home during your time in Washington.

Our hope is that while you are here you will learn much about the government of Washington state and other states in the nation, but also a little about our history, our people and our natural beauty. I hope that while you are here you will have a chance to maybe go to the top of our Space Needle; take a ferry boat ride across Puget Sound; enjoy a cup of Starbucks coffee and some of our fine wine.

Washington is a great state to visit, and a great state in which to form relationships, whether in business, education or in government. Please enjoy your visit and make plans to come back. Our doors are always open and welcoming.

Thank you for taking the time to visit our state's capital. If you have any questions I am happy to try to answer them.