

Retirement Statement  
Lt. Governor Brad Owen  
March 8, 2016

I would like to take a few minutes of your time for those that are interested and answer the question what I have planned for the future and I understand that there are a few of you who would like to know. In making a decision like this after over forty years in public office it takes a significant amount of soul searching and conversations with a lot of people but most importantly with Linda and myself.

This decision could not be made without her because my success in the last nine elections have been heavily influenced and determined from her 100% support and direct wholehearted involvement. It is impossible to say or show how grateful that I truly am.

When my term ends I will have walked the halls of this magnificent building for 40 years, six as a member of the House of Representatives, fourteen as a senator and 20 as Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate.

My discussions with many for the last couple of years have taken me on a long trip down memory lane and I have revisited many of the road bumps and celebrations along the way. My career has put me before Kings, queens and princes, presidents and ambassadors, actors and the giants of industry. My work on international matters has taken me to places many would be envious of from the Great Wall of China to the torn down wall of Berlin.

I have seen the incredible masterpieces of the great terracotta warriors and other archaeological treasures of Xi'ian, China and the beauty and magnificence of the phenomenal ruins of Machu Picchu in the mountains of Peru. It was a privilege to be invited to speak in Spain at the University of Salamanca possibly the oldest universities in Europe and before the King and Queen of Spain at the centuries old palace of the King and Queen in Leon as they dedicated a new exchange program with the University of Washington.

From those trips we have helped hundreds of people connect with business, education and the arts and have been vigorous in our pursuit of goodwill, peace and harmony with people throughout the world.

Here at home I have witnessed great accomplishments and sorry inexcusable scandals and have been a part of political strategies some that have succeeded and some that have not. But when reporters and people in general ask me what was my greatest and most important accomplishment.

It is not the legislation I introduced and helped pass or the bills I worked to defeat. It is the great and glorious satisfaction of helping a fellow citizen of this amazing state when they have been caught in the stranglehold of the government bureaucracy or the occasional, what seems to be hopeless grip of a heartless business, where neither can see the struggling individual as a person but as a problem to be dealt with by ignoring their human needs in favor of a policy or a dollar.

Let me quickly share a couple cases with you. There was the teacher who inherited her husband's tremendous gambling debts after they divorced. She went to the businesses owed the money to work it out but instead they sent debt collectors after her and garnished her wages, took what little money she had and her daughter's money being saved for college and set up an impossible payment schedule she could not pay while raising two kids alone. The incredible part of this case is she never tried to get out of the debt even though it was clearly not her fault. Her Dad told her to call me.

I met with the industry representative and we made a couple of calls. The garnishment was lifted, her and her daughter's money returned and they settled on the payment plan she originally asked for.

A young man broke his neck and ended up a quadriplegic. Years later a care taker talked him into somehow signing for a loan to fix up her house and make it more handicap accessible. She told him that she of course would make the payments on it. The work was not all done and of course she didn't pay and the bank went after him and his parents, simple working class folks with no resources to pay the debt.

It was clearly fraud by an unscrupulous caretaker and no matter what they said or did the bank would not listen to them. The family called me at the suggestion of my sister. We made two calls, one to the bank and the other to the state. The caretaker was charged with fraud, stripped of her caretaker's license and the bank went after her and not the family which relieved them of enormous stress. .

Finally a friend was wrongly denied a lotto machine for his store. He called me when I was a senator and we checked into it. He was denied several times even after we were told by the agencies rep that they were going to approve it. When I became Lt. Governor I found out that the reason he kept getting denied was a district manager for the lottery commission was p.o'ed at him for going to a senator, me, years earlier. I went ballistic and he finally got the machine after losing thousands of dollars. He could have and should have sued the state.

The question that I have for my friends in government and business is, "why did all of these people ever have to come to me for help?" Just think what a little listening, understanding, and compassion and less arrogance would have done for them.

If all of you in this room, actually in this building have not figured it out yet, let me share this with you. You are in a phenomenal position to help people. So please use it!

So, that, along with my success in helping with resources for drug affected babies at PICC and funding for Mentoring Works Washington is the beautiful and rewarding part of my time in politics, being able to help people.

Then there is the other side that many of you have heard me talk about. That is the insanity of partisan politics. All it does is create an environment of "us against them" instead of "all of us for the people". The team should be the body not the caucus, the senate not the party.

I have never understood how you can take the most valuable thing you have as an elected official, your vote, and give it away when in your heart you do not believe that you should.

We see the stubborn, my way or the highway attitude of partisan politics creating gridlock on a national level. We hear idiotic partisan comments challenging someone's patriotism because of their position and opinion or action on an issue when I have to ask, is not the ability to have a radically different opinion and be able to express it freely the very foundation of the United States of America?

I grew up during the Viet Nam War but did not have to go there, however I served in the house and the senate with two that did, Senator Dan McDonald a very conservative pro-business republican from Bellevue and Senator Rick Bender a labor democrat from Snohomish County who later became head of the state labor council.

Do you believe that if one found the other wounded in a rice patty in Viet Nam they would have stopped before helping them and asked, "Are you a democrat or a republican?" No! All that would have mattered is a fellow American needed help and I know neither would have hesitated to help the other! Why do we hesitate to help each other because of party? It defies common sense not mention the common good.

I have personally felt the sting of partisan politics both from the democrat and republican side over my nearly 41 years as an elected official and it all stemmed from I should be a leader as they see it, rather than as I see it and, as I believe, how the people I represent see it.

Now I do not profess to have been perfect in striving to be independent and not bow to caucus or partisan pressure. I did, rarely, but I did. There were only two of those occasions in forty years where I truly regretted it and seriously wanted a do-over. But my friends, you rarely get a do-over in this business. Each decision, each vote, each cave in stays with you forever, but then so does each courageous act of statesmanship. And I can tell you the courageous act of statesmanship feels a hell of a lot better than the sinking feeling of caving in to partisan peer pressure.

My goals when taking this office were to restore the order and decorum to the senate that I had learned from the incredibly gracious and dignified Lieutenant Governor John Cherberg. It had slipped after he retired. I always felt a great deal of pride and very high sense of responsibility when I was in the house and the senate.

I marveled at this amazingly beautiful building. I always felt it exemplified the extremely important work that is to be done here and it demanded to be respected and that meant we and anybody who shared these walls and halls with us were to be respectful. I am so thankful that your rules and your support have allowed me to protect and preserve the dignity of this magnificent institution.

Upon taking this office going on 20 years ago I endeavored to use the office to develop close and meaningful ties with people from around the world, to make anybody who visited our state, whether it be for business, or education or to promote the arts or just enjoy our beautiful home, the great state of Washington, to let them know we welcome them and are so honored they have chosen our state to pursue their goals. My office has become so well known as the go to place in government for welcoming people from around the world. With that came numerous requests to help promote our wonderful state worldwide and I was regularly asked to lead trade, education, cultural and goodwill missions.

One of the wonderful side effects of our work internationally was how close I was able to become with many, many of the international communities and their representatives right here in Washington state. There are my great friends from the Chinese community, and the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims of the Indian families. I regularly participated in German and Austrian celebrations, was invited to be a part of many Jewish celebrations and have met wonderful citizens here who came from Peru and Norway and Spain and attended many, many Mexican fiestas.

Of course if I did not mention the Asia Pacific Islanders particularly Samoa my friend Lua Pritchard may not invite me to another celebration. The Korean community was always so generous and kind which probably has a lot to do with my two sons coming from Korea and then of course the wonderful Filipinos.

I know I have not mentioned them all but my friends know this; you have a tremendous treasure in this state, the beautiful mix of humanity, the incredibly fascinating and dynamic people who have literally built this state and made it so very special and the envy of the world. We have never been harmed by opening our doors to the world. On the contrary, we have been blessed by it.

My final goal when the voters entrusted me with this job, but one that was very, very dear to me was using my office to promote efforts to help the beautiful diverse children of our state avoid the scourge and pain that can be caused by drugs, alcohol and other harmful substances and to recognize the hurt that can be caused by bullying when in fact they should learn to respect the beauty of diversity.

From my time in the senate until I ended my Strategies for Youth program just a few years ago as Lieutenant Governor I had traveled to over 600 schools in very possibly every legislative district in the state. We touched the lives of over 300,000 kids and the letters and calls and emails and personal testimonies said it mattered. One of the great yet most idiotic comments I received in all of those years was from a newspaper reporter who referred to me as being overzealous in my opposition to drugs. No apologies here!

But that commitment to our kids also brought the worst pain that Linda and I ever experienced in my 40 years of public service when it was said we did it for personal gain and were not allowed the true opportunity to prove otherwise.

What hurt the most was not the accusation but when I asked of the people that I had worked fairly with for years to give me the means to just make my case, not let me off, just make my case, I was rudely refused. But like my last opponent said in the campaign, "That's just politics."

Although we ended that program that I loved to do with the kids, I continued to work on behalf of kids as an active chair of a mentoring organization, Mentoring Works Washington. I have for fifteen or more years. You have always supported it and I thank you very much for that. Please continue to do so.

Needless to say I am very proud of the Lt. Governor Brad Owen Nursery Room at Pediatric Interim Care Center in Kent where they help the precious innocent victims of drug abuse survive through their first months of life after being born racked with their mother's drug addictions. Barb Drennen and her team of caring, loving workers have built a model of care for these babies, but quite frankly, it has taken help from me and Senator Fain and many other representatives and senators over the years.

Senator Fain I began helping Barb and the babies when you were in elementary school. I am very thankful for your steadfast support of PICC so please never back off of your commitment and continue with vigor the fight for Barb and the babies.

Nearly twenty years ago I took a much underused office and with the help of many people that worked in my office over the years, made something significant out of it that I am very proud of.

But now I will be leaving this office when this term is up next January. I will leave it for the next lieutenant Governor to build upon, to make it even better. Of course I sincerely hope that the voters choose a person that cares as much about the dignity of this place, about this institution as I do. And most of all I cannot express how important I believe that it is for the person who follows me to carry on what I believe to be the hallmark of my 20 years as president of the senate, the true unequivocal commitment to nonpartisan running and decision making before this body.

Many have asked me what I will do. Well there has been some interest in me doing international work, however, I have not committed to anyone yet. Other than that, I don't know *probably nothing*. Probably just sit around watch soaps, game shows and DR. Phil. Maybe I'll mow the lawn and maybe not. I suspect I will find something to do.

So, to my family first, thank you for your wonderful support and your tolerance of my job when you may have felt neglected because of it. I hope that you all know how much you all meant to me throughout these years.

And to all my friends and supporters many who are with us today it is impossible to return to you what you have given me, but I am extremely grateful to you and am honored to have your friendship. I asked you here so I could publicly say thank you.

And finally to all of you here in the senate and across the rotunda in the house, I thank you for the work you do, the commitment and sacrifices I know many of you have to make to be here. I truly thank those that stood by and helped me in my time of need just as I have steadfastly done for all of you whenever I was asked over the last nearly twenty years. I am very appreciative of the time you have allowed me today to share these thoughts with you.

And finally to the people of the Great State of Washington who put their trust in me as a Shelton City Finance Commissioner, as a member of the House of Representatives, as a State Senator and finally, as your Lieutenant Governor. It was a rare privilege and a great honor.

Thank you!