

County executive talks about views on airline flights at Paine Field and his support for business

By John Wolcott
SCBJ Editor

In a 30-minute interview with SCBJ, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon discussed his views on bringing airline service to Paine Field and responded to questions about his support for business.

SCBJ: You said during your recent state-of-the-county address to the Everett Area Chamber of Commerce that you have been against airline service at Paine Field since your days in the state Legislature. Why is that?

AARON: My concern, since airline issues at Paine Field came up while I was in Olympia, is simply that I was concerned and still am that too many houses were allowed to be built up around the airport. I don't believe that's a good place to have airline service under those circumstances.

But I also learned during the MRD studies we held in the county recently that if an airline wanted to come to Paine Field there was nothing we could legally do to stop it. So my philosophy on the airport is that air service will be necessary here sometime in the future but because

it wasn't planned for I'm not comfortable with it. It will happen in a densely populated area and I believe it will affect the quality of life there.

I have friends in Save Our Communities who are mad over my position and I have others in favor of the service who want me to do more. I've found no evidence it will create thousands of jobs or that it will cause learning disabilities in children, opposing arguments used by both sides.

SCBJ: The majority of the county council publicly admits the need for negotiating with the airlines but fight it privately. You, on the other hand, appear to accept the airlines are coming but you seem to work to stall it. You didn't sign the council's joint resolution on moving ahead with decisions for a county-built airport terminal but on your visit to Washington, D.C., you reportedly sought congressional help to call off the FAA "pressures."



Aaron Reardon
Snohomish County Executive

AARON: I didn't sign the resolution because it directed me to negotiate with the airlines, which I was already doing. As for the trip, I told the Everett Chamber that I was flying there to meet with our delegation on local government topics. While meeting with Reps. Jay Inslee and Rick Larsen, they saw The Herald story about FAA pressures that seemed to be outside the rules. I asked if they would see why that was happening. Inslee contacted the FAA in Seattle and was reassured that the county was continuing to negotiate in good faith and was not in danger of having FAA funding stopped.

SCBJ: Along that same theme, I hear some people say they think you often make public statements about efforts to keep Boeing in the county, yet you seem to work against the airlines coming here, which endangers FAA dollars for Paine Field that Boeing believes are essential. Is this the way to really promote the image of a business friendly county?


AARON: I'm not emotional about Paine Field. I'm very candid about it. Despite my personal feelings I continue to make sure we are seriously and fairly negotiating to bring them to Paine Field.

At the same time, I'm often vilified by

SOC because I'm not a cheerleader for their cause. I have good friends in business pushing me to lead the parade in favor of the airlines.

Some people wanted me to champion the NASCAR track in Marysville and they're still mad at me for pulling out. I made that decision because the backers refused to put more skin in the game. If we had gone for it, we would have wound up today with an empty \$250 million race-track to pay for. NASCAR is losing popularity and canceling races around the country.

Locally, we're making Snohomish County business friendly by seeking local and regional ways to encourage business and bring the economy back without waiting for stimulus money or help from Washington, D.C., which will take a long time to get here. We need to make things happen now in the county and that's what I'm working on for businesses and for jobs. I'm also leading the charge to keep Boeing here when they build their second 787 production line. We're taking a very business-like approach, we're following the law and it's not right for the county executive to get emotionally involved.

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Field!

Horizon Air expects to begin commercial air service at Paine Field soon. Months of negotiations with Snohomish County officials appear to be concluding.

