

# BUILD IT AND ...

## New structures at WSUV, Clark College loom as part of solution to economic crisis

**W**hen it comes to an informed, logical understanding of the solutions to Washington's severe economic crisis, the state Senate gets it. On the other hand, the state House appears misguided.

All legislators understand the problem, which has been quantified in a budget shortfall of almost \$9 billion that has forced both chambers this week to produce budget proposals that everyone seems to hate. The solutions, though, are subject to debate. The proper strategy, even in severe budget-cutting times, is to create good jobs, ones that will sustain a long-term economic stimulus.

That's why Washington State University decided earlier this year that constructing a \$39 million, four-story electrical engineering building at the Vancouver campus was the top capital-construction priority in the entire WSU system. That's also why the Senate agreed, including the appropriation in its capital budget this week. Senators understood that the WSUV building will be adjacent to an \$18.3 million semiconductor testing laboratory proposed by Washington Technology Center, a statewide economic development organization. Together, those buildings can trigger the high-tech educational efforts that are necessary to lift the local, regional and state economies.

It is therefore mystifying that the House version of the capital construction budget does not contain the WSUV building. Instead, House members have chosen to focus funding on maintenance and preservation of existing buildings. At least, some of the state representatives feel that way. But a couple of more enlightened and visionary state reps disagree. State Rep. Tim Probst, D-Vancouver, an expert in work force development issues, said eliminating the WSUV building from the House budget is "really a shame, because that project matches our economy so well." And Rep. Jim Jacks, D-Vancouver,

a member of the House Capital Budget Committee said, "I'm very disappointed. I definitely want (the WSUV building) constructed in a timely manner."

Probst and Jacks also lament the absence in the House budget of a \$2.5 million health and advanced-technology building at Clark College. Senators — again, more wisely — included that building in their capital spending plan.

We see at least two tugs-of-war unfolding here. First is the inherently political power struggle between two rookie legislators — Probst and Jacks — and old-guard clout-wielders in the House. It's unlikely that either newcomer would describe it as a struggle, but that's the way politics works. Fortunately for both, they have the extreme clout of the other chamber, the Senate, working in their favor.

And state Sen. Craig Pridemore, D-Vancouver, has both the connections and the budget-writing experience to help Clark County prevail in this matter. He calls the House budget "irresponsible," adding, "Clearly, the Senate budget is far better for economic stimulus."

State Sen. Joe Zarelli, R-Ridgefield, also has the kind of pull on the Republican side that can help these WSUV and Clark College buildings survive in the final budget.

The second tug-of-war is between WSU and traditional rival, the University of Washington. The House capital budget includes \$38 million for reconstruction of Balmer Hall on the UW campus in Seattle. But in our opinion, renovating or replacing old buildings does not stimulate an economic recovery as much as new buildings that house new programs and produce modern jobs. The governor's office and budget-writers from both chambers will hammer out a final plan. We hope they all recognize that the House presents a weak, Band-Aid approach to capital spending while the Senate properly envisions investment spending that will pay huge dividends for many years to come.