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Contact: Matt Morrison
Executive Director
Cell: (206) 399-4023
Matt.Morrison@pnwer.org

Steve Myers
Senior Program Manager
Office: (206) 443-7723
Steve.Myers@pnwer.org

Seattle Space Cluster, Regional Innovation Clusters Highlighted at Economic Forum

SEATTLE – The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) hosted a three day Economic Leadership Forum in Seattle that included in-depth innovation policy discussions with elected officials, business leaders, and innovation experts from across the Pacific Northwest. PNWER leadership consists of state and provincial legislators from both the US and Canada, and the organization looks at best practices and processes for improving trade, workforce, and economic growth across the region.

The Forum's innovation sessions kicked off with former Gov. **Chris Gregoire**, CEO, Challenge Seattle and former Washington State Governor, showcasing the Cascadia Innovation Corridor Partnership. Attendees were called on to support the "Mega Region" and the need for facilitating strategies that accelerate the Pacific Northwest economy. Gregoire defined the region to Vancouver, BC; Seattle, WA and Portland, OR but was open to collaborating the greater PNWER jurisdictions.

Gregoire called on elected officials to be engaged and get involved to "Help Invent Tomorrow Together," the bi-line of the Cascadia Innovation Corridor. She also called on officials to be proactively looking at workforce, transportation, and housing challenges and stressed that the region can benefit economically from collaborating and cooperating together.

Following the Cascadia Innovation Corridor keynote, attendees heard from a panel of experts on innovation policy for the mega region. **Nirav Desai**, Senior Partner, Moonbeam moderated a panel of experts that included **Jaime Fitzgibbons**, Founder and CEO, Ren.ai.ssance Insights; **Bill Tam**, Vice President, Business Development, Canada's Digital Technology Supercluster; and **Jennifer Fox**, Director, Chief of Staff, Autodesk. Panelists were asked if geography matters in fostering economic development in the region. Fitzgibbon stated, "It matters a lot, because of the innovation ecosystem. You must have investors, early adopters, and innovators. When they get together, they can share and pivot ideas off of each other and learn from each other. The growth and center of gravity is there."

Tam noted the importance of providing the pathways to not only help industries adapt their operations to the digital realities but also to ensure that we are building the trained workforce needed for the future. Fox supported this theme by highlighting the wearables and life science cluster in sports apparel that exist in the Portland area. Advances in technology and innovation are transforming incumbent industries that traditionally have not been considered high-tech sectors or utilized technology for everyday consumer uses.

The Smart Grid session was moderated by **Brian Young**, Director of Economic Development, Clean Tech Sector, Washington Department of Commerce the panel explored policy developments, changing role of utilities, and new technologies that will transform the way electrical grids work. Expert panelists **Karen Studarus**, Electricity Infrastructure Group, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and **Jason Zyskowski**, Senior Manager, Transmission & Distribution, Snohomish County PUD, spoke to the advances in low emission technology incorporation into the grid to ensure low-cost energy reliability to manufacturers and consumers. The future demands for low to zero emissions while maintaining the current reliability in the energy system is critical to the economic livelihoods of the people and industry in the region. Studarus stressed that the region must continue to invest in research to support future needs and challenges in the energy sector. Studarus went on to say we can lead the nation and the world in clean energy reliability if we get it right. Zyskowski showcased real world operations in Snohomish County that utilize new technologies that are providing low-cost energy reliability.

Rounding out the innovation showcase, attendees learned about the Space Sector in the Puget Sound from a panel of industry experts. Washington State has one of the largest Space clusters in North America. Space as a sector, has changed from primarily federal programs to a majority of private industry players. **Emily Wittman**, President & CEO, Aerospace Futures Alliance and Washington State Space Coalition, moderated the panel with **Curt Blake**, Chief Executive Officer, Spaceflight Industries; **Ken Young**, General Manager, Aerojet Rocketdyne; and **Roger Myers**, President-elect, WA State Academy of Sciences.

Myers stated that the US is seeing a huge transition from government led programs because the barriers to entry in the industry currently requires much less capital. Workforce and Transportation challenges were all highlighted as limiting factors that are hindering the growth of the sector in the region. Wittman went on to stress that workforce in the industry is not limited to individuals with advanced science and mathematics degrees. Workforce development can happen in high school and at the community college level of education. Many jobs in the space industry can be obtained without an advanced degree.

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Further topic-specific press releases are forthcoming. Photos available upon request.

ABOUT PNWER

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a public/private non-profit organization created by statute in 1991. Member jurisdictions include Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and the Canadian provinces and territories of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region; identify and promote "models of success; and serve as a conduit to exchange information.