

 **Current**
 67°F
 94°/64°
 Complete Forecast

 **Thu**
 Clouds
 breaking
 87°/48°

 **Fri**
 Mostly sunny
 87°/51°

 **Sat**
 Not as warm
 with some
 sun
 81°/53°

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Voice of the Mid-Columbia | Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, Wash. | Wednesday, September 2, 2009 8:58 AM

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Ken Robertson

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 Tuesday, Dec. 09, 2008
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Ask the Editors

Ever wonder why the Herald does something? Or how? Or "what were they thinking?" Now you can find out. Executive Editor Ken Robertson and Managing Editor Rick Larson will do their best to explain what happens in the TCH newsroom - and why.



Rick Larson

Can we learn to replace confrontation with compromise?

By Ken Robertson, Herald Executive Editor

When several prominent board members of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center visited the Tri-Cities on Tuesday and sat down with the Tri-City Herald's editorial board, it was almost like taking a trip back 30 years or more into Washington's political and economic past.

Those were years when the state's politics were filled with progressive Republicans who built coalitions based on roots planted when Dan Evans was Washington's governor for three terms extending from 1965 to 1977.

Former Sen. Slade Gorton started his political career in 1958 in the state House of Representatives, rising to majority leader eight years later. After three terms as state attorney general, he was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1980 and served three terms there as well.

Ralph Munro worked as a special assistant to Evans on public schools, colleges and universities and then was elected Secretary of State in 1980, a job he held until retiring in 2001.

Ruckelshaus was the first administrator of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, appointed in 1970, and he later returned to the EPA as its fifth director. In between, he was acting FBI director in 1973.

And Jack Creighton was president and CEO of the Weyerhaeuser Co., leading it through turbulent times in the paper industry during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The four were here to pitch the Ruckelshaus Center's role as an agent to help solve some of the state's knottiest problems, some of them issues that have defied legislative, court and virtually every other kind of potential solution for 20 years and more.

Think urban-rural land use issues that set farmers and suburbanites at odds over how to protect streams and waterways. Or watershed management that protects fish runs, keeps farms thriving, rivers clear and hydropower online. Or even proper staffing levels in the state's hospitals, where nurses unions and hospital administrators have been at odds for more than two decades.

At an age when many folks are ready to sit down and enjoy retirement, the four are working to make Washington a better place to live and trying to enlist folks who live here into signing onto the center's problem-solving process to tackle their toughest issues.

Munro points to an effort to resolve conflicts along the Nisqually River in Western Washington, which flows from a glacier on Mount Rainier to tidal mudflats on Puget Sound. Along the way, the river flows through almost every land and water use issue imaginable. And there's a typical history of conflicts to go with it.

Tribal fishing rights, streambank protection, farming, hydropower, private and public timberlands, national and state parks, an Army base and a wildlife refuge all play a role in creating a management plan.

And the landowners, public officials, tribes, businesses, environmental interests and farmers have managed to build a coalition that has a working plan all of them are invested in.

It's become a great example of what can happen when people sit down together and work to find common interests and solutions instead of taking hard-line positions, Munro says.

It's reminiscent of a time when political solutions were crafted by compromise, not ad hoc

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