

Washington is a great place to build airplanes and will continue to be

Speculation that Boeing might establish a second 787 assembly line in South Carolina has fueled a lot of unwarranted bashing of Washington state's business climate, write Reps. Phyllis Kenney and Jeff Morris. Washington consistently rates well as a place to do business.

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BOEING'S decision to buy a plant in South Carolina that manufactures portions of its 787 has fueled speculation the company may establish a second assembly line there.

The announcement also unleashed the expected torrent of misleading or flatly false anti-Washington talking points, with critics accusing Washington of not supporting Boeing, the aerospace industry and business in general.

Not so. The fact is, every year the nation's most respected business publications and research institutions place Washington in the top ranks of business-friendly states. For example:

- In this year's "Best States for Business" ranking, Forbes placed Washington number three. In 2005 we were 12th, and we've improved each year since.
- The Beacon Hill Institute ranks Washington sixth in the nation for our ability to attract new businesses and provide high standards of living for workers.
- The Tax Foundation reports that per-capita state and local taxes paid by Washingtonians puts us in 35th place; 34 other states have higher state and local taxes. This could come as a surprise to citizens who continually hear that high taxes are a menace in our state.
- As for business taxes, the Foundation named Washington the 12th-most "business-friendly" state. (South Carolina sits in the middle of the pack, in 25th place.)

The charge that Washington drives businesses away doesn't hold water. Instead of perpetuating these damaging myths about our competitiveness, let's work together to keep our aerospace industry strong.

How do we keep Boeing and other aerospace jobs here, and strengthen a solid foundation so Washington can remain the global leader in building the world's best airplanes?

We've answered these questions before, successfully. When it comes to competition for a 787 production facility, Washington state is 1-0; the others are 0-1. In 2003, the Legislature crafted an aerospace-jobs plan that kept the 787 in Washington. Since then, the Legislature:

- Approved tax incentives (\$3.2 billion over 20 years) lowering Boeing's cost of doing business if Boeing built the 787 Dreamliner here.
- Provided \$1.6 million in 2006 to house the work-force-training program for the 787 and its suppliers.
- Allocated \$1.2 million in 2007 to establish the Advanced Materials Science and Engineering Center at Western Washington University. This center integrates chemistry, physics and engineering into the production of materials used in industries such as aerospace, microelectronics and biotechnology.
- Invested billions of transportation dollars to help get people to work and goods to market.
- Lowered taxes on aerospace-parts manufacturers and amended our unemployment-insurance laws to help our aerospace industry maintain competitiveness.
- Enacted several other laws in response to aerospace-industry requests, ranging from uniform building codes to professional degree programs.

And with the creation of the Washington Council on Aerospace, Gov. Chris Gregoire and the Legislature are poised to ensure a long partnership with our state's aerospace industry.

Clearly, the state has taken bold steps to keep our aerospace industry healthy, but we must continue to look for ways to stay competitive.

One of our biggest strengths is our workers. Nothing Washington provides is as vital as the highly skilled work force that is the lifeblood of the aerospace field. Our engineers, computer scientists and machinists are second to none.

The challenge is to make sure today's students have the education and training they need to keep on making the world's best airplanes.

We'll continue addressing Washington's aerospace competitiveness, and make sure that Washington remains the most productive place for the industry to do business.

Now more than ever, the fortunes of our state and our aerospace industry are linked. It's a mutually rewarding relationship that can and should reap benefits for both for decades to come.

Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, D-Seattle, left, is a member of the Washington Council on Aerospace. Rep. Jeff Morris, D-Mt. Vernon, is a member of the Legislature's Aerospace Task Force.