

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT PRESENTS KEY AWARDS
TO THE NEWS TRIBUNE OF TACOMA AND EVERETT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER
JESSICA OLSON**

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The Washington Coalition for Open Government has honored a Tacoma newspaper and a newly-elected member of the Everett School Board with Key Awards in recognition of their work to make government entities in Washington open and accountable to the public.

The News Tribune was honored for its successful effort earlier this year to force the Tacoma City Council to comply with the Washington Open Public Meetings Act during the process to fill two vacancies in the council's ranks. TNT Publisher David Zeeck sued the council for OPMA violations after it pared down a list of 44 applicants to eight finalists without a public discussion -- or a public vote. A Pierce County judge granted the newspaper's request for an injunction against the method the council used to select the finalists. According to the state Open Meetings Act and prevailing case law, governing bodies can evaluate qualifications of candidates for appointment during closed-door meetings, but any final action must be taken in public.

"Going to court is still the only way to enforce our open government laws. Citizens throughout Washington should thank The News Tribune for stepping up to defend the public's right to know what the government is doing by putting their money on the line for attorney fees and court costs," said Toby Nixon, president of Washington Coalition for Open Government. "It's an example of why professional news media are so important to our democracy."

Zeeck will receive the Key Award on behalf of The News Tribune on Thursday, Feb. 18 at a brief ceremony in Olympia during a gathering of newspaper publishers at the state capital.

Olson, who was elected to the Everett School Board in November, is being recognized for her efforts to promote greater transparency by the school district. She has proposed that school board meetings be broadcast via the internet or television. During her election campaign, Olson was critical of secrecy surrounding school board actions and ran on a strong open government platform. Olson is a member of WCOG and frequently

requested public documents from the district. That experience prompted her interest in open government and her eventual run for a school board seat.

“It takes a great deal of courage for a member of any government board – especially a brand new member – to stand up to their fellow members and demand that they follow the law and even go beyond the minimum requirements to enhance public participation and transparency,” said Nixon. “Jessica Olson is to be commended as an example to other council, commission, and board members everywhere.”

Olson will receive her Key Award at a ceremony April 7, at 6 p.m. at Everett Station, 2930 Wetmore Ave. in Everett, at an open government forum presented by WCOG sponsored by the City of Everett, The Herald of Everett, and the League of Women Voters of Snohomish County. Also featured at that event are Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed, Washington State Auditor Brian Sonntag, WCOG President Toby Nixon and Ramsey Ramerman, assistant city attorney and public records specialist who works for the City of Everett. The forum will be moderated by Bob Drewel, executive director of the Puget Sound Regional Council.

The Washington Coalition for Open Government (WCOG) is an independent non-partisan non-profit organization founded in 2002 by a group of individuals representing organizations with a broad spectrum of opinions and backgrounds, all dedicated to the principles of strengthening the state’s open government laws and protecting the public’s access to government at all levels.

For more information, contact Washington Coalition for Open Government, 6351 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664 or on the web at www.washingtoncog.org or call (206) 782-0393.