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WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES CREATION OF NEW LEGISLATIVE AWARD

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The Washington Coalition for Open Government, a non-partisan, statewide group dedicated to fostering government transparency in the Evergreen State, has announced a new award designed to recognize Washington legislators who support those aims.

At a breakfast gathering Dec. 10 in the State Capitol, WCOG President Toby Nixon (himself a former state representative) said the watchdog group will, beginning in 2011, bestow an award annually to a legislator or legislators "who has demonstrated outstanding dedication to the cause of open government."

The new honor has been dubbed the "Ballard-Thompson Award" in honor of two former legislators long noted for their commitment to the principles of open government.

Clyde Ballard retired from the Washington Legislature in 2002 after a 20-year career representing the 12th District in north-central Washington that saw the Republican lawmaker rise to the post of House Speaker. Alan Thompson is a retired newspaper publisher and legislator who served the 18th District of southwest Washington for 21 years in both the House and Senate from 1965 to 1986. He served the ensuing seven years as chief Clerk of the Washington House of Representatives.

Tracey Warner, editorial page editor of The Wenatchee World, Ballard's hometown newspaper, said it best in a recent editorial: "Both men, among the founders of the Coalition for Open Government in 2002, were constant and stalwart defenders of the public's right to know, to have access to the records guaranteed them by law, to ensure public business is conducted in public. It was often a struggle against persistent efforts to erode those rights. Ballard — as his constituents we are proud of this — quietly stood firm time and time again. So too did Thompson. They were consistent in their principles, as all should be."

Thompson, who was owner and publisher of weekly newspapers in Cathlamet, Winlock and Castle Rock, addressed the Dec. 10 gathering and recalled how his work as a journalist sparked his passion for openness and transparency that marked his legislative career. Ballard spoke to the gathering via a videotaped message prepared in advance. He described his journey from the poor son of migrant farm workers, to success as a small businessman selling medical supplies in the Wenatchee Valley, and on to state politics and eventually House speaker.

"Transparent and accountable government is not a partisan issue," said Nixon. "During their time in the legislature, Clyde Ballard and Alan Thompson, a Republican and a Democrat, demonstrated that again and again, promoting openness in the lawmaking process and defending the people's right to access public records and meetings. We hope that today's legislators will follow their examples and be likewise committed to defending the people's right to know what their government is doing, so that it actually becomes difficult for the Coalition to choose among many worthy nominees to receive this award."

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.