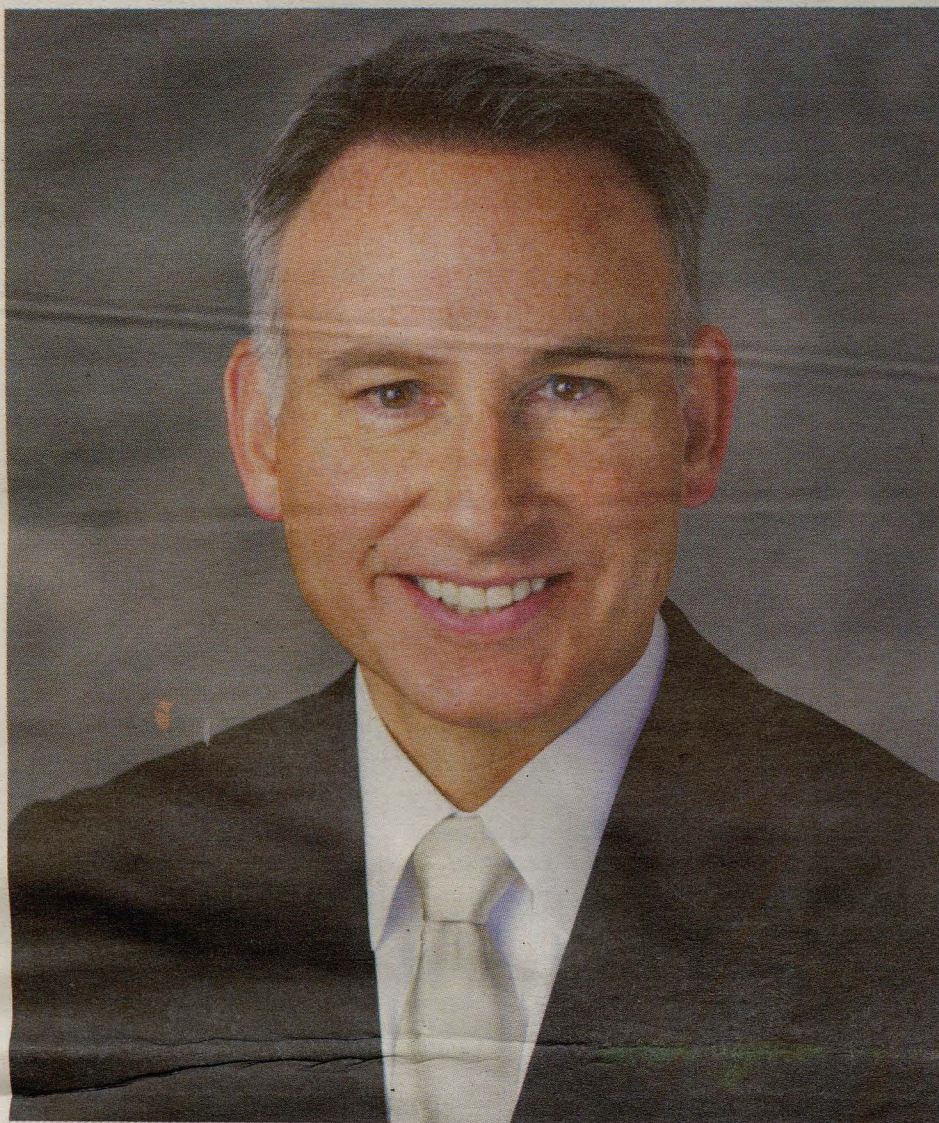


“Our True North”



By King County Executive Dow Constantine

It is my honor to have the opportunity to address the community in this venue.

This year, as we celebrate and honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., finally there is an awakening taking place in America – an awakening of the national conscience to the brutal reality of racism and not only its generational impacts, but its continuing impacts – first to Black and other people of color – and to our entire society.

In this moment of great struggle and anxiety, as we fight through and ultimately begin to recover from this terrible coronavirus pandemic, we have an

unprecedented opportunity to remake ourselves and our nation. At King County our goal is – not to return to normal – not to patch back together a deeply flawed and harmful status quo – but to create, together with community, something better – that beloved community Dr. King dreamed of, and dedicated his life to.

For King County government, this work is guided by our True North: *Making King County a welcoming a community where every person can thrive.*

Efforts to create a government that is by and for the people and that also serves with equity and racial justice run deep in the DNA of Dr. King’s namesake county.

Executive Ron Sims introduced the tenets of Equity and Social Justice into our County culture in 2008. In my first year in office I made ESJ a central pillar of our countywide Strategic Plan, then created our Office of Equity and Social Justice; and then we committed to learning how to truly lead with racial justice.

And we continue to work towards Dr. King’s vision. About 6 months ago, I appointed veteran King County equity leader, Anita Whitfield as our new Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer. Together with me, she will lead all the County’s work to ensure we are a truly pro-equity and anti-racist community and workplace.

Also last year, I joined with Public Health Director Patty Hayes to declare racism a public health crisis, and we committed all of King County government to implementing a racially equitable response to this crisis – centered on community, and on those who are the most negatively affected.

With the guidance of a diverse and talented group of county professionals, led by people of color, I submitted and the King County Council unanimously passed a \$12.4 billion biennial budget that puts our money where our values are. That budget includes an investment of \$350 million in permanent supportive housing for the chronically unsheltered, as well as funding for numerous anti-racism efforts, criminal legal system transformation, and community engagement.

Specifically, my budget shifts \$4.6 million of marijuana excise tax revenue from law enforcement to community-based programs; provides comprehensive, community-based services to about 800 young people in lieu of filing charges; and invests \$750,000 to co-create and implement alternatives to policing in urban unincorporated King County; among many other initiatives.

It is not enough, but it is a down payment on all that is before us to begin to address the disparities and harm that institutional racism has caused.

To the community members who have helped us, led us, directed us and held us accountable on this journey so far – I thank you and recognize that the work we do in King County government only builds on the decades and centuries of work and sacrifice of so many of you, who, just like Dr. Ben Danielson – who graced King County with his knowledge and wisdom during our annual Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration event this year – have dedicated their lives to building a beloved community.

As a government, and a major employer in King County, we will center equity and racial justice in all that we are, and all that we do.



“When you are willing to make sacrifices for a great cause, you will never be alone.”

-- Coretta Scott King