

SEN. CHRIS MARR REMARKS
HSSA CONTRACT SIGNING CEREMONY
December 21, 2009

As the prime sponsor of the Senate companion to HB1705, which the legislature passed in 2007 to establish the Health Sciences and Service Authority, I am pleased to join you today to witness the formal award of the first two grants by the HSSA.

Thanks to the efforts of many in this room, the HSSA fulfills a vision for bio-science based economic development by promoting basic research and accelerating research commercialization and technology transfer. In addition, it provides a tool for the funding of critical public health services—and perhaps most significantly, creates a nexus between health science innovation and healthcare service delivery. It does this through mechanisms which have enabled prior state initiatives such as Community Empowerment Zones and the Life Sciences Discovery Fund.

Over the past 10 years, Spokane has acknowledged that our economic future, as well as our quality of life, is highly dependent on our highly developed, innovative regional healthcare delivery system. When combined with the presence of a world-class higher-education cluster, it offers huge opportunities for clinical and applied research which can benefit the entire State of Washington.

As a past member of the board of the Institute for Systems Medicine, and a current member of the Life Sciences Discovery Board, I am convinced that the long-term solution to solving our national healthcare crisis lies in our ability to use bio-science research to dramatically shift the cost curve downward and improve outcomes dramatically.

It can provide the diagnostics and treatments that can eventually predict cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other ailments, prove that science through clinical research and create living wage jobs around the commercialization of pharmaceuticals, medical devices and protocols that bring that research to market.

In doing so, it taps the leading edge research currently being conducted in Washington's research universities—UW and WSU, and creates huge economic development opportunities.

Let me give you an example:

As you may know, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in women today (after lung cancer) and is the most common cancer among women, excluding non-melanoma skin cancers. 1.3 million women will be diagnosed with breast cancer annually worldwide this year, and 465,000 will die from the disease. In the U.S., death rates have been dropping, because of earlier detection and better treatments. But still, 40,000 women will die this year alone from breast cancer in this country.

Even in early-stage breast cancer, cells may break away from the primary tumor and spread to other parts of the body (metastasize)—particularly the lymph nodes. Therefore, doctors give adjuvant therapy to kill any cancer cells that may have spread, even if they cannot be detected by imaging or laboratory tests. Yet we know that of the 45% of node-negative women under 51 years of age that receive chemotherapy in the United States today, only half of them benefit from therapy. That has led to very exciting research around protein, genetic and bloodborne markers—including some sponsored by the Life-Sciences Discovery Fund, which will someday allow us to pinpoint those who need adjuvant chemotherapy. Much of that is going on right here in Washington. Imagine the potential cost savings and the women we can help avoid these painful treatments. Then multiply that by the number of diseases where we can predict treatment outcomes. The potential to drastically reduce healthcare costs is unlimited. This is the type of research we hope our investment in the Institute for Systems Medicine will result in—providing huge benefits for Spokane County and the citizens of Washington State.

Of course, solving the Healthcare crisis requires short and long-term approaches. That's why today's second grant award to Project Access is so important.

Because without access to basic healthcare and specialty services, without screening and early diagnosis, or access to much needed pharmaceuticals—the citizens of Spokane County will see no benefit from the innovative medical treatments available to us today or in the future. And for that reason, I can think of no organization more worthy of an HSSA than Spokane's Project Access. Under the early leadership of Dr. Sam Selinger and the devoted team he assembled, Project Access has established a true community partnership to provide the full range of medical care to the low income uninsured that serves as a model for our entire State.

So, as we witness the signing of the grants for the Institute for Systems Medicine and Project Access, let's appreciate that healthcare innovation, while exciting in and of itself—only serves us all if we all benefit from it. Thank you to the Health Sciences and Services Authority for showing us in these two great awards, that they embrace this principle.