

It is an honor to be here this morning. The City of Centralia sits at the confluence of the Chehalis and Skookumchuck Rivers. Long before it was a city, the location was known as a place for people to gather, trade and learn from each other. Our waterways gave way to railways and then highways, but Centralia has continued to be an important part of regional trade routes. Today, we celebrate the emergence of a new form of trade and commerce in green hydrogen. Importantly, hydrogen represents economic development that will also help preserve our natural environment and the abundance found in our rural area. This movement towards making the Chehalis Valley a Hydrogen Valley is a symbol of hope for my community. Centralia has struggled to thrive as coal mining has waned, with a poverty rate 1.5x higher than Washington State overall. Our schools have been the most impacted by the loss of tax revenue from the coal mine. The green energy economy will help us build a future – both through taxes invested in our local schools and creating the full spectrum of jobs that will slow the brain drain of our students leaving town and never coming back. And to be moving together arm-linked with our Cowlitz and Chehalis neighbors and with the full support of our state government builds on the best of our history, harkening back to the days where the rivers were a gathering place and a source of commerce. As Mayor of the City of Centralia, thank you to all of you who have worked so hard on this application. Thank you Fortescue, thank you Chairman and Chairwoman and thank you Governor.