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October 27, 2015

Mr. Ben Stuckart
Council President, Spokane City Council
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.
Spokane, WA 99201

Dear Council President Stuckart,

Thank you for conveying your concerns about GSI's dual role as a regional Chamber of Commerce as well as the Economic Development organization. We appreciate the long-term partnership with the City of Spokane and are committed to assuring the best possible working relationship between our organizations. We welcome the opportunity to talk further about your concerns.

To share some perspective on GSI's dual role, there is a widespread view that it is a distinguishing characteristic that is serving our region in many beneficial ways. It has created a collective voice for eastern Washington in Olympia and in Washington, D.C. that has yielded strong results for years, including last year's results that benefit the City, as well as our surrounding communities. Last year's successes were the work of many civic, business and policy leaders over decades of joint advocacy for medical education, a transportation package that completes the North-South Corridor, support for public school levies and bonds, investment in higher education to support current industries (manufacturing, health, etc.), as well as support for emerging industries, such as bio-medical research and the development and growth of a new entrepreneurial eco-system.

Many actions taken by GSI are a direct benefit to the City, and we hope that you have found that we collaborate on many things that improve the economy of the City as well as the entire region. GSI has taken an active role to help support many of the City's priorities, including a "safe downtown" by advocating expanded youth education and employment opportunities, internships and apprenticeships. We carry key elements of the City of Spokane legislative agenda with us when we are in Olympia and Washington D.C. Together, we are a stronger voice. In short, we are partners with the City in both our chamber and economic development roles.

You may find it of interest that several other chambers are replicating the integration of the economic development agencies into the chamber, modeling what Spokane already has in place. Tri-Cities, Everett-Snohomish and Skagit Valley Chambers are among them.

At its annual retreat in August, the GSI Board agreed upon its priorities for the year. The Board adopted the pursuit and study of forming a "port district" to be more competitive as a region than we have been. We have studied how smaller communities (like Moses Lake) have been able to provide incentives to attract employers. We believe working together on a regional basis for a shared prosperity will help us get farther faster.

All of this is not to say we don't hear your concerns. We do. We will be sharing your letter with our Executive Committee next week. From there, we will discuss next steps in continuing this conversation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Christine Johnson".

Dr. Christine Johnson
Chair, Board of Trustees

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Larry Soehren".

Larry Soehren
Chair-Elect, Board of Trustees

Cc: Mayor David Condon
Spokane City Council
Spokane County Commissioners

Alisha Benson, GSI Interim CEO
Anne Marie Axworthy, GSI Assistant Interim CEO