

Clark County Conservative

An Independent Conservative Voice for Clark County

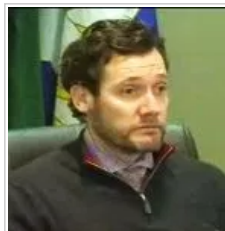
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Tim Leavitt, The Little Mayor Who Cried "the Bridge is Falling"

BY LEWWATERS

6 Votes



Mayor Tim 'the Liar' Leavitt is once again relying on another **campaign of deception** to ramp up the fearmongering to sell the Columbia River Crossing light rail project.

As we all know, the CRC light rail project has been a very contentious and bloated project to force Clark County into accepting an over-priced bridge replacement designed solely to carry the light rail Clark County voters have rejected numerous times from Portland.

The project was seen as having no chance of survival, thanks to the work of the Majority Coalition in Olympia, especially that of Sens. Ann Rivers, Don Benton and Curtis King.

But then the I-5 Bridge over the Skagit River collapsed after a semi-truck with an oversized load struck 10 critical structural beams and proponents began an intense campaign of fearmongering, falsely comparing the two bridges, the one in Skagit County up north and the twin spans the CRC light rail project hoped to replace down here in Clark County.

Like others, not letting a good crisis go to waste, Leavitt joined in the parade of fearmongers, **penning a letter** directly to the legislature encouraging them to fund the massive light rail project and, relying on his employment as a "Professional Engineer," lays it on pretty thick in an attempt to convince the legislature the bridge is ready to collapse, even though his engineering degree is in "Environmental Engineering" and not **Structural Engineering**.

From that letter linked above we read,

"You are all no doubt aware the Columbia River I-5 crossings at Vancouver have been rated 'fracture critical'. As a professional engineer I would like to share more detail that may clarify the severity of this rating."

In the next paragraph he writes,

"The point is, the Skagit River bridge collapse is an ominous reminder that **failures do occur**, often with catastrophic results." (*emphasis in original*)

Right off the bat you can see his effort is to fearmonger by use of the dubious engineering term "fracture critical," a scary sounding term that actually means little in regards to a bridge collapsing due to age, but that the design of the time left a structure without redundant structural support as we build today.

The one point he leaves out is the fact of an oversized load hitting those 10 structural supports is credited with causing the collapse.

I did a little digging on **bridge collapses in America** and found that since the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (*Galloping Gertie*) in 1940, there has been 40 collapses of bridges in our country for various reasons.

Of those 40 collapses, two were caused by heavy trucks, the one recently in Skagit County, Washington and the Harp Road Bridge in Oakville, Washington that collapsed under the weight of a truck hauling an excavator in August 2007.

Two others were the result of tanker trucks that were involved in accidents and caught fire, softening the steel holding up those bridges.

But 10 of those 40 collapses have been the result of a collision from water vessels. One fourth of all bridge collapses in America since 1940 has been caused by some sort of impact from waterborne vessels, ships or barges.

This is a point Leavitt leaves out of his attempted fearmongering, largely I imagine due to his support of a reduced clearance bridge to accommodate light rail, it being unable to climb a steeper grade and the design of it running along a second lower tier under the main bridge.

Leavitt says,

"While it is virtually impossible for a Mega Project like this to appeal to everyone, the current bridge replacement strategy is a sound project endorsed by local, regional and federal agencies at every political process step, and it will serve our region for decades to come."

Again, he leaves out that voters have rejected the light rail when allowed to vote, his own efforts to seek a way to bypass voters to approve funding of light rail and that every alternative put forth wasn't even given serious consideration, again due to the sole

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position of demanding light rail be forced into Clark County.

He says how this new bridge will serve the region for decades, but once again leaves out those businesses upriver that will see reductions in their ability to meet customer needs by being unable to ship large items they manufacture under a lower bridge that is currently being "mitigated" to provide tax dollars to make up for lost profits as well as relocate if need be.

But going back to his concern of a collapsing bridge, the current span provides 178 feet of clearance when the lift spans are raised. The replacement design initially called for 95 feet and was raised to 116 feet when the river is at its lowest level. As we saw in 1996, the river is prone to flood occasionally and we also see a rise in the level of the river every year as the spring run-off from the mountains fills it to capacity and above at times.

But Leavitt and other proponents aren't worried about a barge or other craft colliding with a reduced clearance bridge even though, as I showed above, the likelihood of a water vessel collision is greater than that of a land based vehicle causing such a failure.

Leavitt continues,

"The Skagit River I-5 bridge collapse was a terrible accident that could have resulted in deadly consequences, but this incident can have a broader, positive impact if we recognize it as a wake-up call about just how vulnerable some of our bridges in Washington State are. In the case of the Columbia River Crossing, every day we delay moving forward with a replacement bridge we are putting our people at risk."

Again, absolutely no concern over river traffic colliding with a 'Bridge Too Low' or the potential of a catastrophic collapse and subsequent deaths from that. Just the usual 'hurry up, we got to get this going.'

Even more ironic and not included in Leavitt's letter, the sticking point on this whole project is the light rail that he also supports and refuses to oppose, agreeing with claims made by Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, "no light rail, no bridge."

Where is the concern for anybody's safety in that? If, as they keep crying now, the Skagit River Bridge collapse is a "wake up call," why do they still hold a replacement bridge hostage to light rail? If they were truly concerned about easing congestion, improving safety and freight mobility, would they hold a new bridge hostage to light rail that requires a new replacement bridge to have an unsafe clearance for river traffic, making the new bridge even more susceptible to a catastrophic failure should it suffer a collision with a river barge when the water level is higher?

Leavitt sent this letter just before the Willamette Week ran their article, **Washington Republicans: Columbia River Crossing is Dead.**

Apparently, proponents such as 'Lair' Leavitt, Governor Jay Inslee and others don't believe it and will keep fearmongering and pressuring with tales of woe and dire predictions of eminent collapse, ignoring that what they have designed is even more prone to catastrophic failure.

But, when the only concern is light rail and nothing else, the blinders go up and the people are left holding the bag.

You would think someone claiming the expertise of a "Professional Engineer" like Leavitt does would be able to see this folly and wouldn't need it pointed out by a retired auto mechanic.

UPDATE: September 27, 2013 saw another near tragedy occur in Jacksonville, Florida as a US Navy vessel under tow for repairs impacted the **Mathews Bridge** with a 150 foot clearance, closing that bridge indefinitely to accommodate repairs.

Our area was instrumental in ship building during WW2 and should another Pacific War flare-up and our location be needed to repeat the WW2 feat, we will be left out in the cold due to the imposition of a bridge with only 116 foot clearance when the river is at it's lowest.

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June 2013

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June 6, 2013 at 11:27 PM

good article! nice job Lew!

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lewwaters

June 6, 2013 at 11:30 PM

Thank you, Ma'am

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K.J. Hinton

June 7, 2013 at 12:05 AM

Leave-it should probably step away from the bong before he sends garbage and lies to the legislature.

In the end, his lies and exaggerations on a scam project that now won't be built puts his re-election at grave risk unnecessarily.

Had he just kept his word when he ran the last time...

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Chuck Miller

June 7, 2013 at 1:08 AM

Tiny Tim Leavitt is a pathological liar and the citizens of Vancouver and all of Clark County have learned that day by day for 4 years!!! They will not forget this election that Leavitt ran on no Tolls & No Light Rail and flipped just after he was elected and all the lies and deceit he has perpetrated about the CRC and the light rail. We are so tired of the Leavitt's of the world, that we work so hard to elect and then they flip on their promises!!!

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Jack

June 7, 2013 at 1:19 AM

THE CRC IS DEAD!! – YAY!!

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*Martin D. Hash*

June 7, 2013 at 6:19 AM

Environmental Engineering? That explains a few things.

Normally, an engineer is an engineer: Electrical, Civil, Mechanical – it's hard shit. We have different specialties but all THINK the same way, SOLVE problems the same way – everything is OBJECTIVE. Whether my PE is structural or not (I'm Electrical), I can be in the room with the structural guys, and we'll come to the same logical conclusion.

I've been wondering why Leavitt seems to be talking out of his ass... It's because he's not really one of us.

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Friend of John Galt

June 7, 2013 at 10:30 AM

Fear mongering and "never letting a crisis go to waste" are typical actions of politicians who wish to get projects or legislation through approval processes against the general will of the voters. While it is frequently successful to motivate public emotion to initiate proposals that the public, in a more normal emotional times, would reject out of hand. (One example is the extensive interference in the private economy engaged in by the Progressive President Woodrow Wilson, that after the crisis (of WW I) was quickly discarded by the public and legislators after the conclusion of Wilson's term...)

I've lived with (and commuted daily) across several bridges that were "fracture critical", including the cantilever portion of the SF-Oakland Bay Bridge and the Richmond-San Rafael bridge. Indeed, the SF-O bridge has a failure during the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 that also brought down the Oakland, Nimitz freeway double deck viaduct. Engineers learned much from these failures and those lessons have been incorporated into "best practices" for new bridge designs, etc.

The Interstate bridge, is of a design that has that same "fracture critical" situation. However, there are thousands of highway and railway bridges built with that "feature" that have been carrying traffic safely and efficiently for more than 100 years in some cases. Those bridges, when given reasonable maintenance, can provide safe passage for many, many decades. As Lew noted, about 1/4 of the bridge failures have to do with water traffic actually hitting bridges — and (most commonly with smaller bridges) the next most frequent failure is caused by accidents involving large trucks.

Using the Mayor's argument — it seems he has actually given extensive justification for a THIRD bridge, built to the west of the Interstate bridge to attract (or regulate) truck traffic off the Interstate bridge. A THIRD bridge would also provide much needed redundancy between the Vancouver and Portland population/business centers. Indeed, if a third bridge were in place, the grievous economic effects caused by damage to or closure of the Interstate bridge would be largely mitigated.

The Interstate bridge is rated as "functionally obsolete" — that simply means that it does not have lane widths and shoulders consistent with current design standards. If we had a THIRD bridge, the existing Interstate bridge could potentially be re-stripped to create safety shoulders (but fewer lanes). With a third bridge removing traffic from the Interstate bridge, that alternative is likely more practical. (I note that the Richmond-San Rafael bridge was re-stripped from 3 lanes in each direction with no shoulder, to 2 lanes with a broad shoulder to the right and a very narrow shoulder on the left.)

The reduced traffic on the Interstate bridge, should a THIRD bridge be built, would also decrease the loads and stress on the Interstate bridge, probably adding significantly to its potential service life.

The other issue is the inclusion of trolley cars in the proposal. Perhaps a THIRD bridge could be designed to accommodate trolley cars at some future date and still be built with sufficient clearance to not interfere with river shipping traffic. Indeed, the longer distance from the existing trolley tracks would allow the lengthy grade necessary to carry trolleys higher above the water. (Should the voters in Southwest Washington every decide that trolley cars are desirable.)

While one of the "strings" attached to Federal money for a new bridge requires a "public transit" aspect, these rules do NOT require any specific transit solution. Bus-based transit can easily meet the public transit requirement — and for Clark County, that is the most reasonable transit solution for the next 30 or more years....

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Clark County CTRAN voters REJECTED extending TriMet light rail into Clark County
June 7, 2013 at 12:00 PM

The bus transit we have is faster, more flexible, and vastly less costly than the proposed light rail
<http://cascadepolicy.org/blog/2013/02/testimony-on-hb-2800-light-rail-to-vancouver-vs-ctran-express-buses/>

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thegunjam
June 7, 2013 at 10:00 PM

I always learn something from your blogs, Lew! I print and file them for quick recall! Thanks!

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lewwaters
June 7, 2013 at 10:17 PM

You're very welcome, glad you like it.

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