

The logo for the Washington Coalition for Open Government features a stylized map of Washington state in the background. The text "Washington Coalition for Open Government" is written in a serif font, with "Washington" in a smaller size above "Coalition for". Below this, "Open Government" is written in a larger, bold serif font. Underneath, the website address "washingtoncog.org" is written in a smaller, lowercase sans-serif font.

Washington Coalition for Open Government

washingtoncog.org

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NEWS RELEASE

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The Washington Coalition for Open Government recognized former Administrative Law Judge Patricia Peterson with a Key Award for her decision to blow the whistle on questionable ethics practices in the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

The Key Award is given occasionally, typically in recognition of a single good act that promotes open government, WCOG President Toby Nixon noted. Peterson's was presented at the WCOG Open Government conference Jan. 23, 2016.

"In 2014, Judge Peterson was preparing to rule on an appeal and was surprised when the chief deputy insurance commissioner pressured her to rule for the insurance company," Nixon said. "Rather than cave, she blew the whistle and shone a light on this problem of administrative law justices who work for the agencies whose work is being reviewed."

Legislation was introduced last session to make it clear such pressure was illegal, Nixon said, although the session adjourned before the legislature completed action on the bill.

Peterson testified in favor of the legislation before the Senate Judiciary Committee last session, and said she hopes the measure will eventually pass.

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“A couple days before the hearing I got a gag order from the insurance commissioner saying, ‘you can’t talk about what happened to you,’” she said. What happened was that after she ruled as she thought was correct – against the insurance company in the appeal – and reported ex parte contact by a representative of the insurance commissioner, she was escorted out of the office. Months later, she reached a settlement with the Office of the Insurance Commissioner that included her resignation as a judge.

Although Peterson cannot disclose details of her situation, she said coverage has been good in several newspapers, notably the [Puget Sound Business Journal](#).

“I still feel good about what I did; think it has had some effect,” Peterson said. “But I would never wish this [experience] on somebody else.” She recalled the comment of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who observed, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

“The arc of justice is creeping backward a bit now,” Peterson said, urging resurrection of the legislation to address such conflicts of interest within agencies.