



March 25, 2026

As the leader of a local nonprofit focused on financial stability, I'd like to share some thoughts on the important role businesses play in the wellbeing of our community. It's no secret that Whatcom County has an affordability problem. Data from the 2025 ALICE Report shows us that 45% of households in Whatcom County can't make ends meet, as the basic costs of living in our community are rising at a much faster rate than wages.

Organizations like bp Cherry Point and Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery provide our community with critical living wage jobs that allow workers and families to not only be financially independent but also support the many other businesses and nonprofits that help make our community desirable. Employees from bp Cherry Point and Phillips 66 Ferndale refinery are some of the most generous contributors to local nonprofits like United Way..

At the same time, both bp Cherry Point and Phillips 66 contribute significant financial resources on a corporate level to support a huge variety of programs and services working to build stronger kids, families, and communities where their employees live and work. These organizations are woven into our community in ways that support industry and philanthropy on multiple levels. Were they to disappear from the fabric of Whatcom County, it would leave a very big hole to fill. Not only would there be major losses in job and career opportunities, the local nonprofit sector would suffer from significant funding decreases.

Last year alone, these two local refineries combined provided over \$445,000 in employee donations and corporate gifts to support United Way and our 24 local nonprofit partner agencies. These critical dollars are providing basic needs like food and housing, vocational and job skills, mental health services, childcare and early learning programs, violence and abuse prevention, educational programs for at risk youth, and so much more. Over 50,000 Whatcom County residents benefits from a United Way-funded program each year. And please note: this is only a portion of bp Cherry Point and Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery's annual community giving. When it comes to corporate philanthropy, both organizations support much more than United Way and for that we are extremely grateful.

As the President and CEO of United Way of Whatcom County, I am not an expert on issues pertaining to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan. What I do know is that local industry is critical to building a strong, thriving community where individuals and families can not only afford to live in Whatcom County, but can contribute their skills and talents while giving back to this beautiful place we call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristi Birkeland".

Kristi Birkeland

President & CEO, United Way of Whatcom County