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Local leaders act on global poverty

By Mike Flynn

An impressive group of Seattle business and civic leaders plans a whirlwind schedule of visits Monday and Tuesday in Washington, D.C., with leaders of the Bush administration and Congress to launch a campaign they hope will push elimination of "extreme global poverty" to the forefront of national discussion and debate.

This is the nationwide coming-out party, in essence, for the Seattle Initiative for Global Development, a most intriguing effort by a group of several dozen local leaders from business and civic affairs who have been meeting periodically for about a year to learn from nationally known speakers about global poverty and how it might best be combated.

The leaders of the effort hope it will become a nationwide movement to focus attention on elimination of extreme poverty as a key to addressing what they describe as "the most pressing challenges facing the world."

Those involved are well-known not just in this region, but in business and political circles around the country.

The Seattle Initiative was conceived by businessman and philanthropist Bill Clapp, founder and CEO of Global Partnerships, who was joined in founding the initiative by former governor and U.S. Sen. Dan Evans, Bill Gates Sr., and William Ruckelshaus, the strategic director of Madrona Investment Group and the first administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The four will be leading the Seattle group, which will include former longtime Washington Secretary of State Ralph Munro; Gen. John Shalikashvili, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Rear Adm. Bill Center, who is president of the Washington Council on International Trade; and business leaders Sally Jewell of REI, Dick Swanson of HomeStreet Bank, Skip Kotkins of Skyway Luggage and Paula Clapp and John Morse of Global Partnerships.

The group's schedule calls for meetings Monday with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Ambassador Robert Zoellick, the Congressional Staff Forum, a media briefing at the National Press Club and a Policy Leaders Forum Dinner. Tuesday's schedule includes briefings with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House International Relations Committee.

What they hope follows this blitz in the nation's capital is a national campaign to raise the awareness of business and civic leaders in other major cities, as well

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as policy-makers and elected officials, about the nature of extreme global poverty and the importance of making its elimination a priority for U.S. policy over the long term.

It's a goal that Evans sees as "the most effective way to address the gravest challenges facing the world -- from HIV/AIDS to terrorism, and from environmental degradation to regional instability."

"Long-term peace in the world is ultimately and completely dependent on eliminating global poverty," said Gates. "We need to start a real discussion in the United States about the elimination of global poverty."

On this trip to D.C., the group is calling for this country to pledge a "fair share" of the estimated \$40 billion to \$60 billion a year that would be needed to really reduce global poverty, with \$20 billion annually estimated as the pledge the United States should make "to begin the leadership role."

Their goal now is to generate a broad-based movement that will bring the most influential citizens to the call for U.S. leadership in global poverty elimination.

Munro said he hopes the trip will "plant a seed with people high enough up who will say, 'Let's put some muscle into this.' "

Jewell voiced the concern that at a time of soaring U.S. budget deficits, "it might not be an occasion that finds people wanting to talk about this. But it needs to gain people's attention."

Clapp, whose personal commitment to poverty alleviation has been evidenced in his organization's funding and coordination of microlending programs in Central America, said "a lot of people back there have

said we need to have a voice raised on this issue. So we're saying, 'We're raising our voice, now give us a hand.' "

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