

## IN OUR OPINION

# Council doesn't need AI software to tell them people are ticked

People are mad at the Oak Harbor City Council for wasting money on the sewage treatment plant, which was millions over its original price tag.

And what was the council's response? To waste more money on a software company that will tell them that people are mad at them for wasting their tax dollars.

What's more ridiculous? To do it, the council is using federal CARES Act funding, money better used elsewhere.

Last week, the council showed tone-deafness by hiring a company called Zencity on a \$15,000, one-year contract — and that's after sizable discounts. The company advertises that it "utilizes AI (artificial intelligence) to analyze resident feedback and deliver actionable insights that help governments prioritize resources."

In other words, the software combs Facebook to fig-

ure out if people are complaining about the city.

To be fair, \$15,000 isn't a large amount of money in terms of city spending, and the reports will undeniably be interesting. People with an interest in local government should be encouraged to speak up and their comments are valuable, but social media posts should be taken with many grains of salt. It shouldn't cost thousands of dollars to figure it out either.

Studies show that online commenters are predominantly males with a lower level of education and lower incomes, according to studies by Pew Research and several media organizations. All demographics should be considered when deliberating government policy decisions.

Angry keyboard warriors hiding behind computer screens already have too much power in society. They've driven away many reasonable people from online spaces who dare to share an opposing view-

point.

That being said, Whidbey Island is fortunate to have many brave, social-media-literate individuals who educate themselves about local issues and make their opinions known without resorting to insults, name-calling, intimidation, threats and nonsensical memes.

Zencity said it is pre-qualified by the government to receive CARES funding, apparently because its service provides information that can be used to guide the pandemic response.

Perhaps in a larger community this information could point to problems like confusion about rules or misinformation that's being spread.

But in a small city like Oak Harbor, it doesn't seem necessary to have a computer algorithm either to explain the obvious to public officials or to provide "actionable" information that only represents an angry few.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Public health

## What's happening with COVID-19 in Coupeville?

Editor,

Mr. Higman, please tell us, what is happening in Coupeville?

Just giving the COVID-19 numbers does not help. It's a huge increase in cases.

On Wednesday, I was at the hospital for cancer medical procedures at diagnostic imaging for five hours, and there were numerous people coming in for COVID testing at the blood draw space.

My husband and I tried to distance, but it is terrifying as we are both in jeopardy.

Please tell the people of Coupeville what is happening.

Linda Thom  
Coupeville

### Voting

## Eliminate electoral college, eliminate the disproportion

Editor,

This is in response to a letter to the editor by Brad Taylor of Oak Harbor, who seems to want to point out that because Trump won a vast majority of rural counties in 2016, a disproportionate number in comparison to Hillary Clinton, who won many of the highly populated counties across America, that this contrast, this disproportionality, somehow argues for retaining the electoral college.

Excuse me sir, but I don't see the logic here.

Eliminating the electoral college would do away with the very disproportionality that supports your argument. The age old American constitutional problem between big-state and small-state representation would become moot.

All regionalism, all factionalism, all "fracktionalism" would disappear. It would be one bo-dunk, one vote. Where you live is irrelevant.



Those wanting to be POTUS, let's put on notice. Raise your game. Address the big issues that affect us all equally. Stop hiding behind the arcane electoral college.

Now, let me see. Why would the Republicans not want to do away with the electoral college?

Steven Horton  
Langley

### Postal service

## Mail that once arrived Tuesday, now 1-2 days late

Editor,

Just a heads up that, despite comments that the postal service is once again back to normal, I do see that certain flyers that I have always received on Tuesdays now arrive on Wednesday or Thursday.

Still. It started at the beginning of the postal problem. It has not

changed, so that suggests that there are still service issues.

Jim Reddin  
North Whidbey

### 'Stand down'

## Elections decided by millions, not the extremists

Editor,

To all the Proud Boys, WA 3%, KKK, Patriot Prayer and armed Antifa extremists — stand down and grow up.

The 2020 elections will be determined by the millions of independent-thinking Americans, who, like me, sometimes vote Democrat and sometimes Republican.

It will not be decided by gun-toting extremists.

As the idiots who tried to kidnap the governor of Michigan found, such actions will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law by proud men and women in professional law enforcement. Do

you really want to spend years in jail by committing election interference felonies or illegal paramilitary activities?

The FBI and state and local law enforcement are ready to pounce. Whatever plans you might have will backfire. The misguided men in Michigan thought they would succeed because they were lied to and they lied to themselves. We have all been lied to; we live in a "lied-to nation."

Yes, the economic situation of white males has been on the decline. But, guess what? Except for the lucky few of all races, everyone's situation has been getting more difficult as greedy corporations have gained ever-increasing power.

We have been lied to by Democrats and Republicans about weapons of mass destruction, the benefits of NAFTA, the dangers of Agent Orange and a thousand other things — and too often the mainstream press has gone along with the lies.

So rather than fruitlessly using your First Amendment rights to advocate for the second coming of the Third Reich, please join

your proud fellow Americans who think and vote independently and are actively engaged in promoting and protecting our growing democracy that was launched in 1776.

We need all hands on deck. We need your big trucks to rescue people from the ever-increasing numbers of floods and fires; your skills as carpenters, plumbers, engineers, etc. to build and rebuild our country; and your hearts and minds to help create "liberty and justice for all."

What we don't need is divisive rhetoric that tears apart families and communities and weakens our country's international strength.

Please consider that your organizations' morally and intellectually archaic philosophies have always been on the losing side of history.

Please think independently from all who lie and join the independent team of Americans dedicated to keeping all politicians accountable and democracy in the U.S.A strong.

Scott Chaplin  
Freeland

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All letters must be signed, include your city of residence and, for verification purposes, a contact telephone number. Mail letters to:

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