

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY The Islands' Sounder welcomes letters from its readers. Letters need to be typed and not exceed 350 words. They must be signed by a resident of San Juan County and include a daytime phone number. Send to editor@islandssounder.com. Letters may be edited for grammar, length and clarity purposes.



Letters

You're vaccinated, so what?

Recently, a neighbor did me a favor by watering some plants while I was away. I wanted to reciprocate by inviting him to dinner. The topic of vaccination came up and he said, "I'm not vaccinated. I have a good immune system. I take a probiotic every day." An awkward silence ensued and our continuing friendship is questionable. Now, I'm fully vaccinated but in a quandary, over how to interact with good people I've known for years who are either misinformed or ignorant about COVID and not vaccinated. My knee-jerk reaction is to tell them the stories my two daughters, who are hospital nurses, and my niece who is an Emergency Room doctor tell me; but then I remember the saying, "The man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." I have to believe anyone not vaccinated, at this point, has strong beliefs and admitting they were wrong is a bitter pill to swallow. I'd certainly hate to see my friends, or their children, get this monster but I don't know how to help them, and I certainly don't want to be near them. Maybe some readers out there have ideas. In the meantime, I'm masking up and waving at a distance.

Mike Buettell
San Juan Island

A ferry frustration resolved

It turns out that Washington State Ferries has no plans to send the 90-car Sealth to the San Juans, confirming its position stated in the June public meeting. As I had found, the reservations system was incorrectly showing a series of vessel changes and service reductions beginning next Monday.

After two unanswered emails, I contacted a member of WSF's planning staff who confirmed that two 144-car Super/Olympic Class boats plus one 124-car Issaquah Class ferry will remain here through the end of the current peak season. I advised him of the discrepancy in the reservations system and he promised it would be updated, which it now has been.

So, for those islanders who may have had difficulties getting a booking, my suggestion is to try again.

And thanks to Justin Paulsen, Orcas Island's member of our county Ferry Advisory Committee, for his help with this effort.

Bob Distler
Orcas Island

Thank you to Larsen and Murray

The San Juan Islands Advocacy Team is a group of concerned citizens from the 2nd Congressional District of Washington working

with the Friends Committee on National Legislation to lobby Congress for a sane and nonviolent foreign policy.

We are writing to publicly thank Senator Patty Murray for cosponsoring Senate Joint Resolution 10, which repeals the Authorization for the Use of Military Force of 2002 (AUMF).

This legislation is similar to a bill passed in the House earlier this year with the support of Representative Rick Larsen. The AUMF permits the president to wage war without the Congressional oversight mandated in the United States Constitution. Repealing the AUMF makes it more likely that U.S. foreign policy will favor diplomacy over violence.

We are grateful to Senator Murray and Representative Larsen for their leadership on this issue. We urge Senator Maria Cantwell to join her colleagues in taking a public stand in support of S.J. Resolution 10 as a major step toward ensuring that current and future administrations will seek negotiated solutions to international conflicts. We urge our island neighbors as well as friends throughout Washington state to contact our Representatives and Senators to let them know that war is not the answer and AUMF repeal is needed now.

San Juan Islands Advocacy Team
Linda Ellsworth, Orcas
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Iris Graville, Lopez
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Reporter's notebook

Karma in a caring community

By DIANE CRAIG
Staff reporter

Sometimes, when we least expect it, life provides opportunities to make a difference, affect an outcome, lend a hand. Often, it comes down to being in the right place at the right time.

Such was the case when I stopped at my local convenience store a few weeks ago to grab a cup of coffee. Normally I pull up in front, but it was a busy Saturday afternoon and the spaces in front were full, so I parked on the side of the building.

As I walked around the corner, an old black van careened into the lot, a side door slid open and a young-ish looking man in Bermuda shorts and a t-shirt jumped out, ran toward the store's outdoor sales rack of sweatshirts and T-shirts, grabbed an armful then jumped back in the van, as the door slid shut and the van sped out of the store's lot, headed toward town. I noticed the license plate and attempted to memorize the numbers.

Something was not right. Did someone just steal store merchandise? In broad daylight? In front of others?

Perhaps they had already paid for shirts and had come back to pick them up?

Not wanting to pre-judge, I walked into the market and asked the manager if he had sold any sweatshirts recently. No, he hadn't and he asked all the other clerks — no one had sold anything off the outside rack lately. After I told him what I witnessed, he called the sheriff's office while another clerk shared a common observation: "Do they know where they are? How many of that type of van with that particular state's license plate do they think are on this island?"

It's true. This is Orcas and those of us fortunate enough to live here know this: there's no place to run. Or hide. And, if you're brazen enough to commit a daytime heist and someone sees you, chances are you'll get caught. It's an *island*, for heaven's sake. A finite space populated with people, many of whom know each other. Or know of each other. Or know someone who knows someone who knows you.

This ideology was underscored later in the week when I went back to the same store to pick up a few household items. Reaching for my wallet to pay, I realized, to my consternation, it wasn't in my purse. I checked my car. Nothing. The last time I had it was hours prior when I stopped at a roadside flower stand to purchase a lovely bouquet as a gift. I returned to the flower stand. Nothing. I retraced my steps to no avail. My whole life was in that wallet. Trying to keep my anxiety at bay, I went home and checked my emails. One popped up with the subject line "Lost wallet?"

The text was from a person I know through other organizations. Someone had sent him a text (how did they know he knew me?) and he let me know the wallet was turned into the co-op in town. I called and when I identified myself as the owner of a lost wallet, the woman at the other end exclaimed "Oh goody!" Someone had seen it at the flower stand and brought it into town and left it at the co-op with someone who recognized my name. I'm grateful to everyone who contributed to my wallet's return.

Islanders take care of each other. That's what we do. That's one of the unwritten rules about being here, mostly because we live with the assumption that what affects one, affects all.

To no one's surprise, the daylight heist suspects were apprehended in town, and \$80 worth of sweatshirts were returned. On my next trip to the store, I was thanked for my quick thinking and astute observations, and management bought my breakfast. Nice.

Island life may not be for everyone. For those who embrace it, however, the joy of being in a community that looks after each other is incomparable. These days, that's incredibly comforting.

Bipartisan bill to improve rural veterans' health care

Submitted by Rep. Rick Larsen's office.

Reps. Rick Larsen (WA-02) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-05) and Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) have introduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to help veterans who live in rural communities get to and from their medical appointments.

The Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2021 makes permanent two successful initiatives providing veterans with transportation services and reimbursement for travel to and from VA medical facilities.

Not only do these initiatives ease the burden for veterans traveling long distances for care, but they have proven to save taxpayer dollars and reduce the number of missed medical appointments at VA medical facilities.

The legislation also streamlines the certification process for volunteers who sign up to transport veterans to their appointments.

"Veterans should not have to worry about how to get to their health appointments. However, travel is often a real burden, especially for veterans who

live in rural communities," said Larsen, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee. "The bipartisan Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act makes it easier and safer for veterans to keep their appointments and access quality health care, regardless of where they live."

"Traveling to and from VA medical centers is one of the most challenging obstacles for veterans to overcome in rural Eastern Washington, and it often results in missed appointments for health care services," said McMorris Rodgers, Co-Chair of the Military Families Caucus. "Where our veterans live should not dictate their access to care, which is why this bill is so important. Providing transportation services and reimbursement for travel to VA medical facilities will ease this undue burden, improve access to care, and lead to more positive outcomes for veterans in Eastern Washington."

"When it comes to accessing essential care and services, far too many veterans in rural states like Montana face a disproportionate number of barriers,"

said Tester, Chair of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. "Our bipartisan bill expands initiatives proven to streamline travel services and benefits for veterans in rural communities, ensuring more folks can get to their appointments no matter where they live."

"Congress has made great strides in increasing access to care for rural veterans, and we can build on that success by providing assistance for rural veterans who have to travel long distances to make their medical appointments," said Moran, Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. "This legislation would make permanent successful VA transportation programs, authorize transportation pilot programs for low-income veterans and enhance other public transportation options."

The Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2021:

- Enables the VA to transport veterans and eligible beneficiaries to VA facilities for care, including vocational rehabilitation, mental health care and counseling through the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) program

- Makes permanent the Highly Rural Transportation Grant, which gives local VA facilities the ability to partner with Veteran Service Organizations and state veteran service agencies to assist with transporting veterans to and from appointments

- Establishes a pilot program expanding the transportation reimbursement program by easing the burden on low-income veterans, making it possible for veterans to access reimbursements two days in advance of confirmed medical appointments

- Creates a pilot program to help veterans in rural, highly rural or Tribal areas travel to access resources provided by Vet Centers

- Requires the VA to establish a pilot program for state, county, Tribal and city governments to improve public transportation connections to enhance access to facilities serving veterans

For a summary of the Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2021, visit larsen.house.gov/uploadedfiles/rural_veterans_travel_enhancement_act_of_2021_section_by_section.pdf.

THE ISLANDS'
SOUNDER

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Eastsound, WA 98245
360-376-4500 • 888-562-8818

The Islands' Sounder (USPS #764-230) is published weekly for \$70 a year (\$116 for two years) to San Juan County addresses and \$85 per year (\$141 for two years) to out of county addresses by the Islands' Sounder at PO BOX 331, Eastsound, WA.

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Periodicals postage paid at Eastsound, Wash., and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to The Islands' Sounder, PO BOX 331, Eastsound, WA 98245.