

EDITORIAL

Charlie's choice

In the past week, Vashon has roiled with the news that our fire chief has not been vaccinated against COVID-19, and has thus far refused to become vaccinated in response to Gov. Jay Inslee's mandate for firefighters and EMTs to do so by Oct. 18.

Instead, Chief Charles Krimmert has asked fire district commissioners to release him from his duty to serve as an emergency medical technician (EMT) so that he can continue to serve as the district's chief.

In a phone call with The Beachcomber, Krimmert said bluntly that the commissioners' other choice was to fire him.

After a hastily-convened commissioners' meeting last Friday, held in closed session, Chair Andy Johnson said that the commissioners had not discussed Krimmert's ultimatum, but that the district would be in compliance with the governor's mandate.

This means, of course, that even if the commissioners decided to keep Krimmert as fire chief, and he remains unvaccinated, he would not be able to respond to any fire or medical calls — something that is in his job description for a reason. While working on a ferry-dependent island that is not home to all of the district's firefighting force, Krimmert has, in fact, responded to calls many times while serving as chief.

One also wonders how Krimmert's \$162,750 annual salary would be adjusted with that change in his job description, and if additional staff would have to be hired to fill his role as an EMT and firefighter.

Krimmert won't say why he is not vaccinated, other than the fact that he does not have a medical or religious reason, leaving the question open to speculation.

Certainly, it is possible that Krimmert objects to the governor's mandate, even though Inslee clearly has the legal right to impose it, under the broad provisions of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 43.06). Krimmert is also a highly paid government worker; one would expect he would respect his employer's rules.

But opposition to a new mandate wouldn't explain away why Krimmert isn't vaccinated.

Vaccines have been widely available for months now, and Vashon's Medical Reserve Corp. — which Krimmert has overseen as Incident Commander of Vashon's emergency response to the pandemic — has repeatedly encouraged all eligible islanders to get the shots, citing the safety, efficacy and public health benefits of the vaccines.

Recently, with the rise of the highly contagious Delta variant, an avalanche of statistics from states hard-hit by the current spike in cases has shown that unvaccinated people are at the highest risk of severe outcomes and death from COVID-19.

During that time, Krimmert has risked those outcomes not only for himself but also for other unvaccinated and immunocompromised others with whom he has interacted — he has gone on medical and fire calls and met indoors with commissioners, community members and his staff. Though masked in all these situations, this behavior, to many, is worrying.

It is deeply unfortunate that Charlie's choice has also now divided our community and eroded confidence in our fire district. On social media, some islanders have even speculated that their criticism of Krimmert might result in the district not responding to their calls for assistance.

This should never be in question. We are confident that our heroic firefighters will continue to act with urgency to serve everyone on Vashon. But the fact that some islanders now even wonder if they are safe from retaliation is beyond troubling.

Facebook threads about Krimmert's unvaccinated status have also developed into heated arguments between the pro- and anti-vaccination camps, with many islanders demanding that Krimmert be fired and some others praising him for refusing the vaccine and calling on him to stick to his guns.

It is hard to see a way forward for Krimmert to continue to serve effectively as fire chief on Vashon, after all this.

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Statement: Pandemic leaders respond to Krimmert controversy

We have been working to keep Vashon safe from the COVID menace for many months, side by side with hundreds of fellow volunteers.

Vaccination has been — and continues to be — the most effective tool we have. That's why vaccination is more important than ever as we face a rising number of cases from the Delta variant and from the desire of so many to "go free" and relax safety precautions. Science has been our guide through all this and numerous studies show vaccination reduces infection, hospitalization and death from COVID-19, including for the Delta variant now circulating among us. Get vaccinated. It's more important than ever right now. We say again: COVID is not done with us.

We were as surprised as anyone to hear about Chief Krimmert's decision. We worry for his safety just as we worry about all our other neighbors who are not yet vaccinated. Sadly, we also worry that some may seize on his position as a rationale against vaccination. Although we disagree with his choice, we also feel we are duty-bound to recognize our work with him over the pandemic months and for years before that. Whatever his views, much of what has been accomplished would not have happened without his support. It is a simple fact that no other Chief we served has done as much to support the work of the Vashon-BePrepared coalition.

What's next? It's not our job to decide that. We can, however, promise this. We continue to work hard to

help the island beat the pandemic and we look forward to many more years of effective collaboration with VIFR.

These are, of course, our personal views. We choose to speak as individuals and we will not be inserting the groups we lead into whatever controversy arises from the Chief's decision. The next steps are up to the Fire Commission and the Chief.

Vicky de Monterey Richoux
Rick Wallace
Dr. Clayton Olney
Dr. Jim Bristow
Jan Milligan

Editor's Note: These individuals responded to a request for comment from The Beachcomber. They have been leaders of Vashon's effort to fight the COVID pandemic.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

■ VACCINATION

Chief must go

People are dying who are not vaccinated. For the Fire Chief to publicly announce that he refuses to be vaccinated is cause for termination. He needs to set a good example for the community and he is not doing that. Get rid of him. It is outrageous and I am so tired of people not paying attention and prolonging this pandemic.

Valerie Vigessa

■ AFGHANISTAN

Make your voice heard

I am heartbroken and appalled by what is happening in Afghanistan. I know many of you must be as well. I have felt deeply conflicted over the years by our presence there, and I struggle to know what to think about the decision ultimately made to leave the country. However, one thing seems clear: The United States has a profound and urgent moral obligation to aid the people who betrayed the Taliban to work for us by getting them out of the country.

Special visas for such people have been created, but as many sources have reported, these have been mined for years in paperwork and red tape.

There seems to be a lack of political will, largely linked to the fear that these people present a national security threat. As an American citizen, the only power I feel I have is to call my representatives and emphasize to them in the strongest terms possible how important this issue is to me, and how I want it to rise on their list of priorities.

Martin Koenig

■ CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Commentary was well-researched

Thank you, Ms. Lisovsky, for your well-researched, informative article on Critical Race Theory (8/12/21). I like to clarify this concept by taking the word "theory" out and substituting the word "facts." Seemingly, a theory is something that can be argued, one way or another. Facts are facts. Black people have never been truly "free" in this country. There has been little if no opportunity for "life, liberty and the pursuit of

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Finding purpose and meaning in the bleak seasons of life

C.S. Lewis, the British writer and professor, wrote, "We must stop regarding unpleasant or unexpected things as interruptions of real life. The truth is that interruptions are real life."

Everyone has experienced events that seem to knock us off our feet. The past 18 months have felt like a major interruption for all of us. We were thrust into the dark days of a global pandemic, stuck at home at first in an unprecedented lock-down. Businesses were shuttered and we were literally banned from human contact. Now, here we are, many months later, wondering what the world will look like when we emerge from the days of the virus which shall not be named.

But sprinkled among the many days of depression and loneliness, there have still been times of joy for my family. My wife and I welcomed a new child into our family, we became "yogis," I wrote and recorded a new album, my wife learned how to make sourdough bread (and she's really good at it!), and our family discovered a new



MARK WAGNER

love for paddle-boarding. I must also admit, we watched the Netflix series *Longmire* for the fourth time, fell in love with *Ted Lasso*, and we bought a VW Eurovan named June that has become our "home away from home." These little bright lights of happiness have illuminated the good that can emerge in the midst of challenging times.

The truth is, though we try, we cannot avoid hard things. Whether it's a job loss, the death of a loved one, a tragic accident, or a global pandemic, unpleasant intrusions are inevitable. The question then becomes: how do we keep going? How do we survive these painful moments and rise up on the other side; stronger, fuller, brighter? My theory is that the only way to gain strength in the weak and bleak seasons of life is to charge through them with a vision for what could be on the other side. Instead of getting angry at God or others for causing this hardship, we ask God (or the Universe; the Spirits), "What are you up to,

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Reporting a perfect audit

Each year, Vashon Island School District supplements its state and federal budget with tax dollars from our community.

These supplemental levy funds account for 14% of our approximately \$26 million budget and ensure we are providing Vashon students with an exceptional educational experience that shapes their lives forever. Your tax dollars are critical to this mission and they must be spent within the guidelines of both state and federal laws. As such, the Vashon Island School District recently underwent an annual state audit and for the sixth audit in a row over the past eight years, in all areas evaluated, the District is reporting a clean or perfect audit to our school community.

We take our jobs seriously as stewards of our community's trust and this means we count every penny.

The pandemic created additional challenges in managing the district finances over the last 19 months. These challenges were varied, from a plethora of accounting changes required by the state to account for COVID-related expenses, delays in funding, a declining enrollment, and even



MATT SULLIVAN

having a remote (distanced) audit.

Starting in April of 2021, members of the Washington State Auditor's Office (SAO) started examining school district records and worked remotely on the audit for more than eight weeks. This year was one of the largest audits the District has had and focused on two areas: (1) financial statements, looking at how the District complies with the standards of accounting and (2) the Federal Single Audit. Audit findings or problems are common for public agencies and many school districts.

A Federal and/or Single Audit is the sixth audit in a row over the past eight years, in all areas evaluated, the District is reporting a clean or perfect audit to our school community.

The audit report, completed July 1, covered Sept. 1, 2019, to Aug. 31, 2020. The auditors focused their attention on the

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Wagner

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really? What lessons am I learning? What knowledge is there to be gained in this season of struggle?"

This simple shift in perspective will change everything. We stop focusing on the mountain of misery and catch glimpses of sunlight peering through the clouds. Those tiny rays of light will guide us on the long path towards wisdom. They are walks on the beach, holding hands with a loved one, laughing at an episode of *Schitt's Creek*, or losing track of time reading a great book. They are the moments of peace and stillness that surprise us, even in the midst of a pandemic when we are forced to abandon our busy schedules to embrace new opportunities.

While we cannot avoid adversity, we can learn through it. In the end, we grow wise not by solving problems but by allowing those problems, and the experience of surviving them, to shape us and to give us a new perspective on life.

The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Wagner is the pastor of Vashon's United Methodist Church.

Editorial

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Neither camp would be happy if Krimmer changes his mind, and decides to comply with the mandate after all. For those who oppose the vaccine, that would be a capitulation; for those who now want him fired, it would be too little, too late.

And only those who oppose the mandate and/or vaccination — a demographic we suspect is a minority fraction of our population, given Vashon's 83% vaccination rates — would cheer the commissioners' approval of any plan to let him stay on as an unvaccinated chief.

Either scenario would need to be accompanied by a highly polished public relations campaign — and doesn't our fire district already have enough to do right now?

This turn of events is surprising and deeply disappointing, as many of Krimmer's past actions as fire chief — in particular his long and vitally important collaboration with VashonBePrepared — have been those of a highly effective public servant.

But that is not what we have seen in the past week. Andy Johnson, chair of the commissioners, said that the board does not face an immediate deadline in this situation, as the mandate will not go into effect until Oct. 18.

Still, we hope this can be resolved quickly. It is weighing on many islanders' minds. They are the ones who pay for Krimmer's handsome salary, and they elected the commissioners who oversee his work. We here at The Beachcomber hope for the best — that whatever happens, our Fire District will be one that islanders can support and be proud of.

Sullivan

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areas that represented the highest risk of fraud, loss, abuse or noncompliance. As noted above, those included our financial statements (reporting) and federal awards to include: Special Education and Food Services (Child Nutrition).

As it pertains to our financial statements the auditors, "reported no

deficiencies in the design or operation on internal control over financial reporting that we consider to be significant deficiencies," the report states. As it pertains to the Federal Awards they, "reported no deficiencies in the design or operation of internal control over major federal programs that we consider to be significant deficiencies." For the auditors, this language is high praise indeed.

Vashon Island School District strongly believes that we should always strive for a clean and perfect audit. We

are committed to high levels of transparency and fully complying with both state and federal laws that govern our district. Audits of this size, scope, and time commitment are not easy on a public agency or the staff, but necessary. The total cost of this year's audit was \$23,208; copies of the audit reports are available online through the Office of the State Auditor at sao.wa.gov.

Matt Sullivan is the executive director of business and operations of Vashon Island School District.

Letters

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happiness." There are countless academic articles, books, and websites to research the actual history of this country. To all people who are still scratching their heads about this, read the books "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates and "How to be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi. If they help you understand how we got here and how we can get out of this cesspool of racism, then hallelujah. If you feel white guilt, know that it is not helpful. As my friend once said to me, your tears are not helping us.

Barbara Thal

■ CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Education doesn't lack lessons about discrimination

Whenever The Beachcomber takes issue with a letter to the editor, which is limited to 300 words, they then search out "guest columnist" who is given unlimited space to counter. This was the case with Jessica Lisovsky's recent column, which responded to Douglas Larsen's challenge to Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Ms. Lisovsky, obviously feels that CRT and the 1619 Project should be taught to our young as a way of depicting the reality of our history, our founders, and the nation's awful historical truths. I don't know where she was educated, but I learned about slavery, indentured servitude, and the way Black people, Chinese, the Irish, the Italians, the Japanese, and the Germans were discriminated against and treated in the United States at different times in our history. How the constitution, the Civil War, the civil rights movement, and the Amendments were created to protect and make discrimination illegal. None of these "ugly truths" were missing from my education.

What I wasn't taught, however, is that I am a racist simply by virtue of being white. I categorically reject this assertion. Do not try and have me accept or my children accept that they are racists or oppressors, because they are not. These are well-documented terms used in CRT training venues. We were all taught to judge everyone blindly, as Martin Luther King suggested, based on character not on race. I don't see color, I see people. To do otherwise is the definition of racism.

The unfortunate truth is that racism still exists, as does anti-racism racism, but recent proof sources like President Obama, VP Harris, Senator Tim Scott, Clarence Thomas and Oprah, to name just a few, demonstrate the fallacy of the systemic racism claim. Gratefully, most Americans will not accept this label, or CRT being taught to our young.

Andy Amstrup

■ CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Cost of asking questions is being labeled racist

Doug Larson wrote a letter to the editor (July 15) addressing the dangers of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and how it has crept into every institution.

Jessica Lisovsky responded in an editorial saying that fear is unwarranted. Ms. Lisovsky included a definition of CRT from the Encyclopedia Britannica which states that CRT is an "intellectual movement." I agree. I also agree with Mr. Larson that CRT calls for race-based solutions to vexing societal problems.

My concern with CRT centers around its role in our schools. The fact that CRT is an intellectual movement means it should be studied in schools as one among many. CRT should not be the "lens" we use to evaluate curriculums, what books are stocked in the library, teacher hiring and assessment, and to create equity trainings.

Our schools have adopted CRT in all these ways to varying degrees under the guise of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

There is a process for deciding on school curriculums that includes community input. This process has not been followed in the adoption of DEI. This is representative of the lack of debate invited or even allowed around how we teach DEI. DEI curricula can be done well but becomes dogma with the influence of CRT. Works that teach "whiteness" as a negative trait are hardly what we would like to devote programs to without scrutiny.

The fact is, many teachers and students fear openly questioning the tenets of DEI. Some may genuinely disagree, and some may merely have uncertainties. But if the cost of asking questions is being labeled a racist, shunned by peers, penalized through grades, or fired, then only the bravest or most foolhardy will take that on. If you are unaware of this problem, ask yourself: if people are afraid to speak, how would you find out?

Celina Yarkin

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COMPASS

Summer 2021 Speaker Series

September 2 @ 11:45 am - 1:00 pm Chautauqua Elementary School

Jim Bristow MD, from the Vashon MCR (Medical Reserve Corps), will talk to us about why our Vashon Covid case rate is 25% of King County, and what the MCR believes our business community should be doing to keep it that way.

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It's Your History August 26, 2021
Strawberry Harvest
By Bruce Haulman and Mike Sudduth

This 1981 Jim Burke photograph of Jim Reinke and Wes Kameda collecting picked strawberries into flats at Tok Otsuka's farm, represents the end of eight decades of large-scale commercial strawberry harvests on Vashon. By the early-1980s commercial strawberry farming on the island was coming to an end. Within five years the major strawberry farms - Otsuka's, Matsuda's, and Takatsuka's - were no longer growing commercial berries and had switched to you-pick operations or changed to other crops.

Forty years later, in 2021, a number of smaller farms are beginning to offer fresh picked Vashon strawberries through their farm stands, but the days of Vashon's commercial strawberry farming are now only memorialized through the annual Strawberry Festival.

You can purchase Bruce Haulman's *A Brief History of Vashon Island* at the Heritage Museum and at the Vashon Bookshop.

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