

NORTHWEST VOICES

Health equity

Dental therapist model helps expand care

Re: "Swinomish tribe, Skagit Valley College partner on new dental therapy program" [Sept. 1, Local News]:

I applaud The Seattle Times for publishing the article by the Skagit Valley Herald's Benjamin Leung and bringing to the public's attention the need to expand dentistry by adding dental practitioners to this profession. It is a great accomplishment by Skagit Valley College and the Swinomish tribe to jointly launch the first program in the state to train dental therapists and get certification by the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

There are thousands of people in Washington state facing difficulties accessing dental care. That challenge is worse for low-income families. In my 40 years as director of Sea Mar's dental services, meeting the demand for oral health care has remained a challenge. It has always been difficult to recruit dentists to work in remote, rural areas such as Port Angeles, Aberdeen and Oak Harbor, where it takes more than a year to hire a dentist. Fortunately, the state Legislature has the opportunity to move a solution forward, such as expanding dental therapy statewide. The dental therapist model adds a provider to the dental care team to offer routine services and preventive care, freeing up dentists to attend complex dental procedures that patients need.

— Alex Narváez, DDS, vice president of Dental Affairs and chief dental officer, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Seattle

Queen Elizabeth II

'Universal grandmother'

Re: "Queen Elizabeth II dead at 96 after 70 years on the throne" [Sept. 7, Nation & World]:

Why does the queen's passing feel like our universal grandmother and rock of ages has just left a gaping hole, even for a Brooklyn-reared "boy"?

Almost 70 years ago, I was born in Newfoundland, part of her Canadian dominion, where my American parents were stationed by the U.S. Navy.

And by happenstance I shared her birthday, and my other half is a Brit. It was also fun to keep track of my own parents' anniversary by how many years Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne, so her very recent jubilee especially resonated.

But all that and squabbles about the relevance or cost attendant to maintaining the monarchy aside, Elizabeth was like the sun. I could count on her, since birth, to rise each morning and be there, until today. As The Associated Press obituary so poignantly reminded us:



"When Elizabeth was 21, almost five years before she became queen, she promised the people of Britain and the Commonwealth that 'my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service.'"

God welcome the Queen.

— Michael B. Goldenkranz, Seattle

Climate change

Inextricably linked to human health

Re: "Wildfire smoke causes worst Seattle air quality in 2 years" [Sept. 11, Local News]:

It should be crystal clear, even as the air we need to breathe is once again filled with smoke and ash, that the ravages of climate change pose a here-and-now threat to everyone's well-being.

This is highlighted in Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility's just published "Climate & Health / Washington 2022: A Special Report on Impacts and Solutions" (which I helped edit). The report, focused on our state, lays out how climate change and human health are inextricably linked and shows that climate change is already having real, documented impacts on the health of the people of Washington and our communities.

Everyone needs to be intimately aware that the climate crisis is a health crisis. We need our leaders

and government officials, in business and at the local, state and federal level, to step up and act quickly and responsibly to both mitigate future impacts (redirect from fossil-fuels and reduce climate changes: to avoid the unmanageable) and adapt (build resilience: to manage what is now, as we see in our air this week, unavoidable).

— Ken Lans, M.D., Seattle

Expand an adaptable tree canopy

The current discussion regarding tree protection is singularly focused on tree removal due to development. A comprehensive policy would include how and when to replace aging, diseased and dying trees. As we strive to deal with the effects of climate change, our tree canopy must be expanded, renewed and modified to include trees infrequently seen here in more moderate times.

My neighborhood is bounded by a green belt of dying madrone and big leaf maple trees, many that were planted decades ago and are now at the end of their life cycle. City crews respond to our concerns about the health of these trees and possible damage to our homes only when large limbs are broken off. This happens more often each season as our winter storms grow more severe.

Policies that encourage homeowners to actively participate in

Share your opinion

Do you strongly agree or disagree with something that's been published on Opinion pages or elsewhere in The Seattle Times? Be a part of the discussion by emailing your letter to letters@seattletimes.com. Letters are limited to 200 words. Please include your full name, address and telephone number for verification purposes only.

— Kay Knapton, Seattle

Snake River

Dam removal is counterproductive

Re: "Inslie, Murray say Snake River dam removal possible, but not yet" [Aug. 25, Local News]:

Like many of us, I am concerned about our energy future. That is why I believe proposals calling for the removal of hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers are counterproductive.

Given the need for clean, dependable energy, it would eliminate this reliable source at a time

we need it most. Plus, removal of those dams comes at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars and would cost hundreds of millions more to replace the energy produced by them.

Unfortunately, the return of those particular wild salmon runs may be wishful thinking. Spawning habitat is only one factor in their survival. Salmon are under several environmental pressures, including downstream pollution, ocean mortality and climate change.

There are better solutions, like investing in additional clean-energy sources, which will serve the greater good and benefit all salmon runs, not just those in the Columbia. Additionally, we could boost our financial support of tribal and state salmon hatcheries, which have a better chance of success and are better adapters to a changing environment. If we are strategic, we can perhaps have all the salmon we want, but we may have to compromise on having them everywhere we want them.

— Robert Bisordi, Des Moines

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California's news desert response a model Washington should follow

SAVE THE FREE PRESS

Brier Dudley
Seattle Times Free Press editor

Washington should be cautious about copying every new policy dreamed up in California.

But the Golden State's new response to the local journalism crisis is one that Washington and every other state should consider emulating.

Under a new fellowship program signed into law on Sept. 6, an estimated 120 graduating journalism students will be placed in three-year jobs at news outlets across California.

The idea is to start restoring local coverage in news deserts. It will also help universities and the profession attract more journalism students.

Half the students will come from the University of California, Berkeley, which is administering the program, and the rest from other journalism schools. The fellowships will pay \$50,000 per year.

This \$25 million program is a smart way to do several things at



once: It boosts the state's higher education system, increases job opportunities for graduates, supports local communities suffering from the loss of local news and helps struggling news outlets survive.

"Journalism and democracy are both in a fragile state. Stabilizing one firms up another," California state Sen. Steve Glazer, the bill's champion, told me.

"My hope is to energize newsrooms across California with vibrant independent watchdog journalism that keeps elected officials accountable and restores faith in news and democracy."

That resonates with Washington state Sen. Karen Keiser, a Des Moines Democrat and Senate President Pro Tempore.

A Berkeley graduate, Keiser heard about the journalism program from the school and "thought that sounded like something Washington state could do."

Keiser is researching how a similar program could be done in Washington.

The state has multiple journalism schools that could participate. I encourage their leaders, and other elected officials wanting to address the journalism crisis, to

help her craft a proposal for the 2023 Legislature.

"This is something we would love to see happen ... for the benefit of democracy across our state," Bruce Pinkleton, dean of Washington State University's Edward R. Murrow College of Communication, said.

Details of California's program are still being finalized. To add further distance between the government and news outlets and avoid appearance of influencing, decisions about fellowships and placements will be made by an advisory board including journalists and educators.

Glazer, an advocate of government oversight and accountability legislation, said the program was designed so the journalism it supports is "completely independent of government."

Geeta Anand, Berkeley Journalism dean, said she wants the program to be flexible about who is eligible and will leave such decisions to the advisory board.

"We'll be expansive and inclusive and draw in enlightened and passionate leadership from other journalism schools, local journalism and other types of journalism to navigate this together," she said.

"That's the only way we'll succeed, if we're inclusive and make this a truly statewide program."

Anand expects to place 40 fellows per year over three years. Finding candidates should be easy; she said "there's lots of interest" in journalism among students and waiting lists for an entry-level class.

"The crisis in democracy right now and the rise in authoritarianism and the climate crisis and so much that's happening in the world is really making young people interested in having an impact and seeing the importance of journalism," she said.

California lost a quarter of its local newspapers between 2004 and 2019. Many of the remainders are ghost papers, with few reporters who can only produce minimal coverage.

That mirrors a national trend that's left thousands of local communities and millions of voters with little to no local news coverage.

The industry is retooling to better compete online but it's not easy, especially with unfair competition in the digital ad market, or happening fast enough to prevent massive job losses in newsrooms.

Meanwhile, democratic governments around the world are looking for ways to save local press systems that are essential to keep voters informed and hold officials accountable.

The European Union, Canada,

Australia and the United Kingdom are considering or have passed laws to help news outlets directly or indirectly. The U.S. Congress is considering similar bills but the most promising one, the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, is under heavy attack by Google, Facebook and their allies.

State efforts to assist are mixed. An advertising tax credit in Wisconsin failed to pass while New Jersey created a \$5 million grant program to support news outlets.

Washington provides a business and occupation tax break to newspaper publishers, similar to what other manufacturers receive, but it's expiring next year.

There is no single solution to the journalism crisis. A mix of responses are necessary.

But for now, California has raised the bar with a creative way for states to assist. Keiser's leadership here is wonderful, and Washington's Legislature should seriously consider a similar approach.

"You can't sit on the sidelines, see the deterioration of journalism, see the fraying our of our democratic institutions and not try to do something about it," Glazer said. "It is groundbreaking, and I hope it will inspire additional support for journalism across the industry."

Brier Dudley is editor of The Seattle Times Save the Free Press Initiative. Its weekly newsletter: st.news/FreePressNewsletter. Reach him at bdudley@seattletimes.com