

COMMENT

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We need to offer involuntary care, but as a last resort

JULIAN DALY

A commentary by the CEO of Our Place Society.

I commend the provincial government's budget for not only investing so heavily in mental health and addiction services, but also opening the door to long-overdue complex-care housing.

It is a bold and much-needed plan that cannot come soon enough, and I encourage the province to quickly develop a successful model.

The timing is also especially welcome when all those camping in our parks are finally being offered shelter or transitional housing.

And while I sincerely hope the vast majority of those who have secured shelter will maintain it until the move into permanent housing, I also know there is a small group who will fail to

retain this housing because they are simply too unwell.

Sadly, these troubled few often end up being barred because of behaviours directly related to their mental health and addictions.

They are not barred lightly. My colleagues across the transitional housing sector do their very best to never bar anyone, but some people are so unwell that, for their own safety and that of others, they cannot remain.

These individuals who wander our streets in obvious and alarming distress are not only a great concern to their fellow citizens — even, at times, a source of considerable fear — but are themselves extraordinarily vulnerable.

The women in this group are the most vulnerable and are frequently the victims of sexual violence and abuse that is as stomach churning as

it is heartbreaking.

This is why complex care housing is so important. When done properly, it will be a place where these unfortunate outliers can get the help they need from professionals who are properly trained and supported to give it.

The workers in our shelters and transitional housing sites simply do not have the professional clinical qualifications to care for folk who are so unwell.

And while many of those entering complex care will go voluntarily, there will be those who will refuse it.

After decades of work in this field, and years of advocating for those who are homeless and struggling, heartfelt and bitter experience has taught me that, in some situations, there is a need to bring people into this kind of care involuntarily.

Sometimes folk are so unwell that they are in desperate need

of help, but because of their illness are utterly unable to make a rational and informed decision in their own best interests.

In these situations, we believe it is the right thing to compel care. We believe that in doing so their rights are recognized — the right to be safe, the right to be housed, and the right to good health.

In doing so, we remove people from incredibly vulnerable and dangerous situations. We believe this should be done only in extreme circumstances and with strong and transparent legal safeguards, limits and boundaries.

I want to be really clear: I am not advocating for the return to the inhumane, often abusive institutions of old.

Instead, I want housing that provides safe, loving and healing care. Furthermore, I believe that involuntary care should only last as long as it takes to stabilize the

individual and for them to then make an informed and rational decision about what next steps they want, and are able, to take.

I do not write this lightly and acknowledge that it will be provocative and controversial to some.

I write it, however, because I have spent many, many years of my working life watching, at close quarters, a small group of very vulnerable and untreated people experience the most appalling exploitation and violence on the streets of our cities — avoided, alone, unattended to, stigmatized, and, frankly, left to live and to die miserable, painful and forsaken lives.

So, I unequivocally welcome and endorse the creation of complex care housing in British Columbia. With it there will, finally, be hope and a chance for belonging for some of the most abandoned of our fellow human beings.

All that backtracking undercuts the message

Looking at what is happening in Ontario with Premier Doug Ford's COVID-19 travel restrictions, and also here in B.C. with road check announcements to ferret out non-essential travel, and the subsequent backtracking by politicians in both provinces with retractions, is the wrong strategy.

If our elected leaders are going to make an announcement on further restrictions or lockdowns, enough forethought must be applied to ensure that they do not have to backtrack, sometimes within hours, due to legal issues or political pressure.

This situation only emboldens the anti-maskers and COVID deniers and further weakens the adherence to the restrictions which have been in place for some time.

I wholeheartedly support our politicians and health officials in this difficult time but let's get it right the first time around.

Mike Wilkinson
Duncan

Do you want a summer? Then be responsible now

We have to act responsibly now or we will not have the chance to enjoy summer because of surging COVID-19 numbers.

We need the chance to meet with friends and family in our backyards and parks while the weather is nice to help maintain our mental health. Let's help knock this thing down!

Alanna Wrean
Victoria

No really means no when it comes to COVID-19

Re: "We want the Ten Commandments, not the Ten Suggestions," Jack Knox, April 23.

The answer to the question "Can I go to Mount Washington?" is very clear.

No! There is no yes to the question.

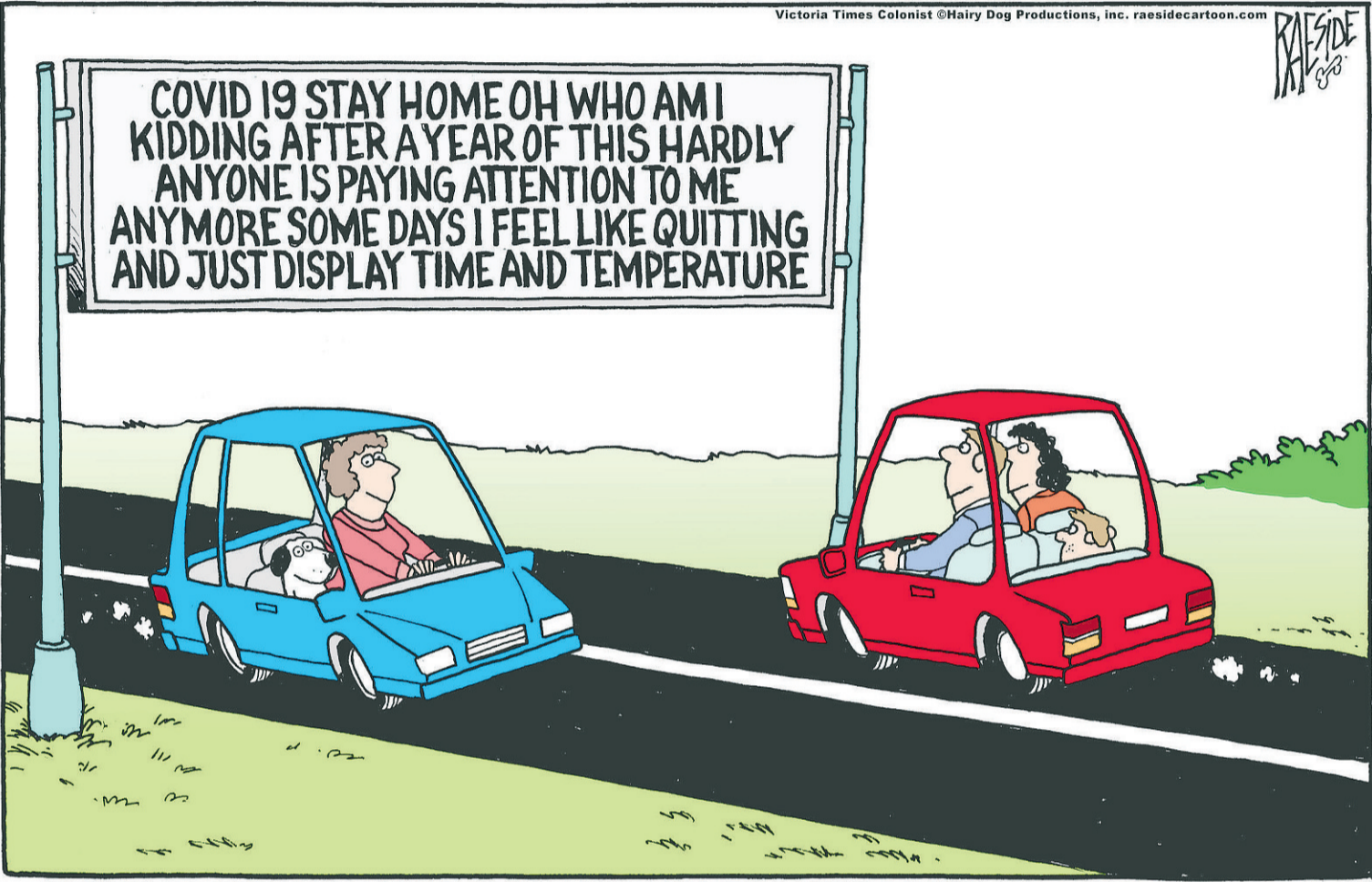
Gerald Marantz
Parksville

Tough enforcement is not the answer

Re: "We want the Ten Commandments, not the Ten Suggestions," Jack Knox, April 23.

In advocating for more rigid pandemic do's and don'ts, Jack Knox undermines his own argument by pointing out the province's reluctance to enforce such rules.

Replace "reluctance" with "inability" and I think you approach the heart of the problem. When police don't even have the resources to effectively enforce the Motor Vehicle Act, how should we expect police and bylaw officers to enforce an even broader set of rules which change



constantly as new data emerges?

Rather than fooling ourselves into believing we can simply enforce right conduct, our energy is better spent mitigating the consequences of predictable behaviour from the selfish subset of our community.

Only a fool believes that greater enforcement of pandemic rules will alter health outcomes in any meaningful way. The real work is being done by the good neighbors among us who need no more than clear, concise guidelines which their consciences will lead them to follow.

Doug Stacey
Esquimalt

Horgan, Trudeau could help Victoria

The *Times Colonist* editorial of April 23, "City councillors need to show support for the police and the people," shows the need for an independent person to be appointed to solve the crisis in Victoria.

On March 18, I sent the letter below to: Victoria mayor and council, Victoria police, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier John Horgan.

"Victoria police union concerned over escalating violence in downtown Victoria," *Times Colonist*, March 16, clearly shows the need for a solution — now. Victorians are not safe in their city.

"The City of Victoria should cease its continual refusal of requests from the Victoria police for necessary funding.

"Another issue is that the federal and provincial governments should restore funding for services previously provided.

"Premier Horgan and Prime Minister Trudeau: Provincial and federal funding needs to be reinstated and expanded to adequately deal with services needed for

those with addiction, mental health problems and those who are homeless.

"An independent person could be appointed to make an in-depth look at the crisis in Victoria.

"This would include talking with the three levels of government and the Victoria police. The independent person could provide a long-term, comprehensive solution for funding for what is desperately needed for the issues described above."

Michael Abel
Victoria

How can we control all those weeds?

I was born and raised in the Victoria and have lived here all my life. I once believed that Victoria was known as the "City of Gardens" and not dandelions.

A dandelion is a weed with large bright yellow flowers followed by rounded heads of seeds with downy tufts.

I am appalled how people in the residential communities and business communities no longer show pride of ownership.

Care home properties, where residents pay thousands of dollars a month to live, don't maintain the grounds.

Even the municipalities of our districts don't keep the boulevards neat and tidy anymore. Are these grounds and maintenance people not working?

I feel this is such an embarrassment overall in our city. Is this situation something the mayors and councillors just don't give a damn about?

I can't possibly be the only person out there who has great concern over this matter.

It's too bad when the Capital Regional District implemented the banning of pesticides in the region that they didn't give

people a viable alternative of how to control the weeds.

Sandra L. Sims
Victoria

Running the city like a tragic circus

It broke my heart to read about the teenager assaulted in Beacon Hill Park.

When will the violence stop in Victoria? When will respect return? I fondly remember the city as a loving community which shut the doors down early in the night during the 30 years I lived there. Both young and elderly felt safe.

I urge the city and provincial governments to change their planning and thinking, and put their combined efforts and finances into solving the mental health problems that appear to rule Victoria.

The fellow arrested after the assault is well-known to authorities, yet he is free to breach his current conditions imposed by the courts and continue to do harm.

In my opinion it is necessary to have treatment centres readily available for those needing help. All other projects like bike lanes, electric buses and outdoor cafes can be put on hold.

City council members should be responsible for the care of all citizens instead of appearing as leaders of a tragic circus.

Gail Brighton
NanOOSE Bay

SEND US YOUR LETTERS

- Email letters to: letters@timescolonist.com
- Mail: Letters to the editor, Times Colonist, 201-655 Tyee Rd., Victoria, B.C. V9A 6X5

Victoria council needs to govern for everyone, not the few

SARAH POTTS

A commentary by a Victoria city councillor.

A few days ago I replied on Twitter to a question about a 15-year-old who had been assaulted in a tent in Beacon Hill Park.

In my reply about this clearly horrific act of violence, I wanted to communicate that what happened to this girl was absolutely awful, as is the prevalence of sexualized violence across our community. One thinks that would be the end of the story.

Instead, part of this singular

reply was taken out of context and used as the basis of an editorial, "City councillors need to show support for the police and the people," as a form of testimony about my complete positions on big topics such as community safety and homelessness.

I would like to add the most important sentence that was omitted from the editorial: "It's awful." I'm a parent of a teenage daughter and my heart breaks over what has happened.

What we focus on matters. It's a shame that the editorial wasn't a rallying cry to bring the community together.

Instead, it was written with intentions to divide the community rather than find solutions. This hurts efforts to secure the resources needed to provide the support and safety that this girl and others urgently need.

We can all agree that no 15-year-old should be living in a park, and that pandemic-driven sheltering in parks is not the safest solution for anyone.

The journey out of homelessness is a complex one, with many steps.

The first step is finding permanent, stable, affordable homes for each person without.

One hundred temporary homes will be opening in Victoria next month. This will house every unhoused person in our city — an unprecedented achievement.

This could only have happened through the significant collaboration between multiple levels of government and community partners.

We need to remain focused on the remaining steps, until everyone in Victoria is safe and secure. That is the vision of this council.

Council must govern for everyone, not the few.

Victoria city council supports

the Victoria police. The police budget was fully funded in both 2020 and 2021, including every additional budget request made over that time.

It's time to focus on what more is needed. Community safety has been shown to require commitments to permanent housing, poverty reduction, accessible mental health care, and harm reduction.

Everyone deserves safety. Everyone deserves a home.

I think we can all agree that a Victoria that focuses on these things is a Victoria where we all prosper and want to live.