 Producing food during a pandemic.

It’s a GROWING CONCERN

As supply chains slow and the surpluses that feed food banks dry up, urban farms are becoming crucial, p.6

HELP YOURSELF

A Little Free Pantry in Tacoma feeds those in need as well as feeding some neighbors’ ire, p.5
Make a statement, Washington State Democrats. Divest from Amazon!

By CLIFF CATHWON
Guest Writer

This crisis has laid all of the inequities of American society bare for anyone who was blissfully unaware of the depth of which racially and socioeconomically unequal we are. Amazon is in a symptom of one of our bigger problems: how unprotected most workers are. While we all enjoy the convenience of Amazon delivering food, games or less vital things to us, recently their employees have started to fight back with stories of an indifferent corporation putting their lives at risk for profit during a pandemic.

At the Amazon fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York, workers walked out to demand safe conditions. In response, instead of improving conditions and recognizing workers’ demands, Amazon high-ups fired at Amazon and Amazon executives were even revealed to have a communication strategy that is currently running a PR campaign to dismiss legitimate criticism of their workplace practices. In the leaked conversation between executives at Amazon, they were ready to utilize racial dog whistles to frame one of the organizers of the walkout, who is a young Black man, as “inarticulate and unintelligent” — a go-to and longstanding stereotype for anti-Black racists.

Amazon isn’t going to stop and improve conditions for their workers, their rights or safeguard the health of their customers through public embarrassment alone. Hell, you’re probably perusing their customers through public embarrass-

OPINION

Washington State
Democratic Party advertises itself as the pro-union and pro-worker party and it has stood for pro-worker policies in the past; now it needs to stand for what’s right and necessary.

Recently, my colleagues and I of the Martin Luther King Jr. County Working Families Party called on local officials to hold Amazon accountable and stand with their workers. (The letter is below.) We are still calling on local officials to do that, and I believe that it is the only way for federal officials and candidates for office to step up and let their money speak for their values.

I was a regional field director for the Washington State Democratic 2020 campaign and, currently, am a precinct committee officer for the Democrats in the 57th Legislative District, and I know that our values exclude racism, union-busting and unaccountable capitalism. Amazon, lording over our region, has a continuous record of working against organizing and turning a blind eye to racism.

Already in the 2020 campaign cycle, Amazon has donated thousands to state and county incumbents and challengers. The political power of Amazon should not be dismissed. Remember when Amazon, with the elected officials it purchased, shut down a tax on itself that would have addressed the housing crisis — that they’ve continued to make worse? Money talks but doesn’t listen. Recently, the Democratic majority in our state Legislature has been tepid when it comes to taxing Amazon, suffice to say it’s tax-athon for Amazon-backed Republicans as well.

Workers have been standing up for us every day. They go to work at grocery stores, fulfillment centers and hardware stores, to jobs with little security and often little pay. So-called “progressives” in our Democratic Party can, at the very least, match the workers’ sacrifices by renown-

Amazon isn’t going to stop and improve conditions for their workers, their rights or safeguard the health of their customers through public embarrass-

TO:
Jeff Bezos, CEO, Amazon
Jeff@amazon.com

Open Letter to Protect Amazon Workers and Our Communities

Dear Jeff Bezos,

Our communities, our neighbors and our families are at risk when Amazon workers are exposed to COVID-19. Many of us live in Kent and around South King County, so we are close to Kent’s Amazon fulfillment center. We are concerned that many Amazon workers may be unknowing victims of COVID-19 and are spreading it to their families and others in and around Kent.

Hourly workers in “essential industries” are putting their lives at risk during this pandemic.

We need you to show leadership and take more steps to protect the workers at Amazon. Workers at the fulfillment center in Staten Island, NY, walked out to demand that Amazon take steps to protect them from contracting COVID-19.

As you know, there are reports of at least one worker at the Kent fulfillment facility who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is urgent that steps are taken to protect all the workers and the surrounding communities.

We call on Amazon to do the following:

INSP
“This undercount is another way that we continue to be invisible.”

— Samantha Biasca of the Na’ah Illahee Fund

### US census collection continuing, but delayed, with new outreach in Native communities

By ASHLEY ARCHIBALD

Staff Reporter

The coronavirus outbreak has delayed much of 2020, from concerts to weddings to sporting events. But the census is still on, and Native advocates are optimistic that this time the census could be a benefit to their communities.

The U.S. census happens every 10 years and is used to allocate billions of dollars of government resources as well as determine legislative districts. Native people have been consistently undercounted, which means they’ve lost out on needed funding and recognition, said Samantha Biasca of the Na’ah Illahee Fund.

“This undercount is another way that we continue to be invisible,” Biasca said. It wasn’t until the 1970s that Native people could self-enumerate rather than allowing census workers to guess their heritage. The majority of Native people live outside of reservations, meaning estimations without individuals’ input were dependent on the person taking down their information.

After the change, the Native population jumped, Biasca said. “People were counted for the first time,” she said. “The numbers really exploded.”

People are undercounted for a myriad of reasons, said Marc Balbus, leader of the Na’ah Illahee Fund. “They all stated that Pigott had been kinder to her,” according to the report.

Pigott was arrested a block away from the shooting. The gun used to shoot Long was not found. Pigott denied involvement in the shooting but said he had heard about the incident from other people experiencing homelessness.

The coronavirus has caused some of that delivery. The Washington state Legislature approved $15 million to fund efforts among community organizations to get people in traditionally under-counted groups to fill out the census, but plans for that outreach have changed because large events are no longer possible.

The new proclamation will be in effect through June 4. “People have lost their livelihoods through no fault of their own and we must continue to take steps to ensure they don’t also lose the roofs over their heads,” Inslee said in a statement.

Washington state had the first known coronavirus case in the United States, but it has also made significant progress slowing its spread. Even so, it will take time to loosen the restrictions on movement, economic activities and larger gatherings to ensure that the virus doesn’t come raging back.

That reality hasn’t sat well with everyone. According to The New York Times, as many as 2.5 million people came to Olympia on April 19 to protest the continued stay home, stay healthy order, ignor ing advice from health professionals to maintain a buffer of at least 6 feet between them. Similar protests popped up throughout the country, fed in part by statements from President Donald Trump, who tweeted about “liberating” certain states and told reporters that he did not want the cure to be worse than the disease.

Washington state and the federal government have stepped in with economic relief for people who have lost their jobs, expanding the group of people who can receive unemployment insurance, boosting the amount that unemployment insurance pays out every month and sending out $1,200 payments to most Americans making under $7,000.

Many will receive payment through direct deposit. Those who don’t may get a physical check. Those checks have been delayed by a matter of weeks because the Treasury Department decided to print Trump’s name on the memo line, according to multiple news outlets.

#### US census collection continuing, but delayed, with new outreach in Native communities

By ASHLEY ARCHIBALD

Staff Reporter

US census collection continuing, but delayed, with new outreach in Native communities

Washington’s response rate to the 2020 census

According to the 2010 census, 5.2 million people in the U.S. identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, either alone or in combination with one or more other races. Out of these, 2.9 million people identified as only American Indian and Alaska Native.
When it comes to life without parole sentences, the state is a global outlier

Mass Incarceration

Washington state’s other epidemic

I
n all, the decades-long epidemic has devastated the lives of hundreds of thousands of Washington voters approved the measure to enact such a policy, outpacing even Washington state was the first in the nation to warehouse, away from the outside world, with no possibility of parole. One factor in the state’s growth is the ‘three strikes’ law. The statute dictates that people convicted of three high-level felonies will spend the rest of their lives warehoused, away from the outside world, with no possibility of parole. Washington state was the first in the nation to enact such a policy, outpacing even the federal government, when 76 percent of Washington voters approved the measure in 1993. It followed the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, which deprioritized rehabilitation as a goal in Washington and cleared the way for a more punitive response to crime.

There are currently 1,329 people in Washington, a state with a population just shy of 8 million, effectively serving life without the possibility of parole. This sentence is prohibited in 80 percent of countries in the world, including our northern neighbor, Canada. Four countries in the minority still imposing these sentences — Australia, England, Wales and the Netherlands, with a combined population of 101 million people — have a total of 146 people serving life without parole.

Washington’s rates of violent and property crime have declined by more than 40 percent from their peaks in 1992 and 1988. Long and lengthy life sentences quadrupled alongside the decline in crime, but there is little evidence that more punitive policies explain the dramatic decline. In 2019, according to the ACLU report, 41.5 percent of all people in Washington’s prisons were serving a sentence of 10 or more years, with 17 percent serving life sentences. One in five people incarcerated in the state are over the age of 50.

And, no surprise, those serving such sentences are disproportionately Black — 3.5 percent of the state’s population, 28 percent of those serving life without parole.

Trauma, crime and transformation

From the time she was 5 years old, Michelle Blair was beaten, sexually molested and emotionally brutalized by family members, according to the ACLU report. At age 12, she ran away from home into struggles with drugs. The next four years were a veritable horror show, says her lawyer, Jeffery Ellis: She was sexually trafficked, suffered physical abuse at the hands of deranged men and bounced between foster care and the streets. (Blair could not be reached for comment at the time of this writing.)

Alienated, isolated and operating in survival mode, Blair ended up with two felonies on her record before turning 15. By 16, she was charged as an adult and pleaded guilty to first-degree robbery in Pierce County. The felony offense would later qualify as her first under Washington’s yet-to-be-implemented three strikes law.

Struggles mounted after her release. Harboring unaddressed trauma from domestic violence and still battling addiction, she ended up selling drugs and sex. Two more strikes followed, for a second degree robbery in Spokane in 1997 and a first degree robbery elsewhere in Washington state in 2003. She took the latter to trial instead of taking a plea deal of 25 years. She lost; her guilty verdict meant life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Because Blair is a “lifer,” many self-help and educational programs restricted to people with fewer than seven years on their sentence are closed to her. A cold economic rationale lies behind these restrictions. Since people like Blair, now 58, won’t be returning to the general population, the thinking goes, money and resources are better spent toward rehabilitating those soon to return to outside life, said Jaime Hawk, the legal strategy director for the ACLU of Washington.

“By no means will I stand here with excuses for the choices I made that led me in the life I was living,” Blair told members of the Black Prisoners Caucus, who provided me with a transcript of their January conversation at the Monroe Correctional Complex. “However, I can stand here now and tell you how the past seven years of experiencing incarceration has not only changed me, but also my way of thinking forever.”

Blair dropped out of school in the fifth grade, but today she has earned her GED. She has taken the few classes the state Department of Corrections offers to those with life sentences and earned credits, after repeated petitioning, via the Prison Pet Partnership program toward a certificate in dog grooming, a newfound passion of hers.

It’s a joy she believed she would be enjoying on the outside with her daughter and two grandchildren after the Washington state Legislature passed Senate Bill 5822 last year. That statute reforms the three strikes law by removing second degree robbery from the list of offenses requiring life without parole. Blair said that the new law would result in her second strike no longer counting toward her mandatory sentence.

“I was so ecstatic to hear that robbery 2 was no longer a strike and I was going to actually have a release date and go home — to watch and be there while my 9-year-old grandson grows up, to take my 12-year-old granddaughter to her soccer games and to just be able to hug my daughters every day,” Blair told the Black Prisoners Caucus members.

But unlike the three strikes policy, the law was not retroactive. It only counted for future offenses. “So you can imagine how devastated I was,” Blair said. “My mind went to such a dark place and I was mentally and emotionally distraught.”

Blair is one of 64 people in a Washington state prison whose second degree robbery conviction still counts under the three strikes law, according to a January Senate bill report.

“Washington has this reputation as a progressive state, and that’s true in some ways. But we really need to address these sentences that leave little hope or access to redemption or transformation,” said Hawk, who wants to repeal our state’s three strikes law.

Breaking down the machinery of mass incarceration

The entrenched racial injustice of our so-called justice system is the inevitable outcome of policies governed by fear rather than empathy. It is what happens when laws named with catchy numeric mnemonics, treaching with cruelty similar
A black Oldsmobile rolled up on 70th Street South in a Tacoma neighborhood. A middle-school-aged boy jumped out and approached what looked like an oversized birdhouse with a glass door, painted sky blue and rust.

His mom called out, asking what was inside. There wasn’t a whole lot: a can of diced tomatoes, packets of instant oatmeal. She asked for the tomatoes — they would be a welcome addition to the burritos she would make that evening.

These are the type of interactions that occur at Kelly and Kurt Norton’s Little Free Pantry, a box on the corner where people in need can come and pick up grocery items like beans, oatmeal or fresh eggs from a neighbor with chickens down the street. It was a way for neighbors to help neighbors when things were tough.

The need has only increased as the coronavirus and associated lockdown has deprived people of income and made grocery stores dangerous for older people and those with underlying health conditions.

The Nortons set up the Little Free Pantry and a Little Free Library (where people can freely come to leave a book or take a book) about two years ago. The library came first, but Kelly Norton works in Tacoma’s Hilltop neighborhood. She kept seeing these little pantries when she went on a walk at lunchtime.

“I got on the website and the only one in the area was in a bar,” Kelly Norton said. That wasn’t accessible enough for her, so she decided to add the pantry on the other end of her house. She and her husband chose the spot carefully — it wasn’t right in front of the house and there was space to park, so people could use it without feeling like they were being observed.

There has been some backlash from neighbors, recently amplified on various Facebook pages. They refer to the pantry as a “bum feeder,” among other unsavory things. Homeless people do use the pantry, but it’s mostly frequented by people like the little boy and his mother in the black Oldsmobile, families who need help to get by.

“There’s not a lot we can do. This problem is bigger than us,” Kelly Norton said. “The pantry is being used to face our current situation.”

The library and the pantry are named after the Ventures, a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame band whose founder, Don Wilson, grew up in the home where the Nortons and their bloodhound-mix Honey now reside.

Initially, the Nelsons were concerned that the decorative guitar picks might get stolen. They had a few extra doors for the pantry and library in their garage, just in

See PANTRY Continued on Page 12
Sowing self-reliance down the supply chain

By KAMNA SHASTRI
Staff Reporter

Nurturing Roots farm in Beacon Hill spreads volunteers across the urban farm on Thursdays and Sundays. Even in the age of coronavirus distancing, people come to the farm from in and around the Beacon Hill neighborhood, which has become a northernmost and privileged South Seattle neighborhood, from Rainier Valley and as far south as Renton.

“There are those moments where it’s a wake-up call,” said Nyema Clark, who runs the farm, “and every wake-up call has an up and a down.”

For Food Lifeline, a food pantry supplier in Seattle’s South Park, a normal day pre-pandemic meant truckloads of tomatoes, potatoes and other fresh staples would come to the warehouse ready to be repackaged into family-size portions by volunteers. These packages would then be delivered to food pantries around the region, providing nutritious choices for food-insecure families.

“Emergency food supply is part of our mission, whether it is natural disaster, political unrest, a pandemic,” said Mark Coleman at Food Lifeline. “We are always trying to be stocked for that to be a prudent reserve of food.” While this is Food Lifeline’s constant aim, the food bank is scrambling to adapt to the pandemic.

Food Lifeline procures food from surplus stockpiles; they usually receive 50 million pounds of surplus food a year, most often from grocery stores. Coleman says Food Lifeline has pivoted entirely to shelf-stable items. Costs have gone up tenfold, and there are not enough volunteers to help package food.

Food insecurity is rising as millions of people file for unemployment, joining the households that were food insecure before the pandemic. Coleman says that right now they have been able to process 100,000 boxes of food a week. But to meet the growing demand, Food Lifeline needs to fill 300,000 — they are scaling up this week, thanks to a warehouse donation from Prologis and volunteer assistance from the National Guard.

Coleman says Food Lifeline is worried about how to reach out to vulnerable communities, people of color and those who live in food deserts and are reliant on public transport. While wealthier households still have grocery store options for nutritional foods, low-income and food insecure households are left with dwindling choices based on what food pantries have in stock. The food system starkly privileges the wealthy and doles out leftovers to the rest.

Failure of centralizing

The global networks that grow, process, package and shelve food at the grocery store might create huge quantities of food, but have complicated links. A contagious and deadly virus like COVID-19 directly attacks those links because the links are people.

“The reason we are starting to see the weaknesses in our food system is that people are getting sick: farm workers, people who work in meat-processing plants, people who work in grocery stores,” food systems expert and University of Washington Department of Environmental and Health Sciences lecturer Yona Sipos said. “And now that there is more demand for people to get paid a few dollars more an hour — deemed to be essential workers — that is putting a massive strain on the whole system at large.”

Sipos sees opportunities to shift from large food-growing models to small and mid-size local farms. Gov. Jay Inslee listed workers who support farmers markets and produce stalls as essential, backing the vital nature of the small and mid-size farms in Washington. These farms have fewer links in the supply chain and can continue to source food during times of crisis.

Small urban and mid-size farms can do this because of something called agroecology — a farming system that mimics the interdependent relationships that exist in nature. That contrasts with mono-crop farms of products like corn and mass planting of staple crops.

Volunteers Kema Jones, Deborah Vanderhorst and Alia Taqieddin transplant starts at Nurturing Roots Farm Sunday, April 19.

Volunteer Taj Granger, 8, cleans off the machete he used to cut weeds at Nurturing Roots Farm.

Volunteer Alia Taqieddin separates the roots of a start so it can be planted in a larger pot.
amounts of poultry and beef — farms requiring massive amounts of water, pesticides and fertilizer. Sipos explains that when farms follow the agroecology method, they eventually need fewer inputs like fertilizer and pesticides.

In other words, smaller, localized farms have the potential to replenish themselves. They are sustainable and change the game for access to fresh, nutritious food.

“When we couple agroecology with community ownership, then we start to be able to move beyond food security into a realm of food justice and food sovereignty,” Sipos said.

Involving the community in growing food can also influence how we think about food in the first place. A shift from thinking about immediate food security to food sovereignty ensures that people of color and low-income communities have the same access to make decisions about and grow their own sustenance.

Urge to personalize

Emergency Food Network serves food pantries in Tacoma’s Pierce County and is facing the same increased demand and lack of volunteers as Food Lifeline. Director Michelle Douglas says that EFN is finding new ways to distribute food to communities that need it most, provide culturally relevant foods and work with cultural organizations. For example, they recently partnered with the Puyallup Tribe to provide 500 families with boxed meals. Families could drive into a pick-up site and load up on pre-packed boxes.

EFN isn’t wholly reliant on surplus foods, though. They have acres of land on Mother Earth Farm. Usually, prisoners from the Washington Corrections Center for Women come help with planting and
**BOOK REVIEW: ‘Tools and Weapons: The Promise and Peril of the Digital Age’**

By Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne | Penguin Press | New York | 2019 | 346 pages

**Good tech, bad tech**

Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne explore the difference between benefit and harm in ‘Cyberia’

**Review by JOE MARTIN**

**Contributing Writer**

In the ancient world of 1998, David Brin, a scientist and respected purveyor of science fiction, penned “The Transparent Society.” It was a nonfiction work assessing implications of evolving technologies proliferating throughout the world. He argued that personal privacy as people had known it was a thing of the past. Official capacities for intrusive surveillance would become pervasive and essentially insurmountable.

Brin proposed a muffled vision whereby all persons in this inevitable see-through culture would have equal access to mulitifold dimensions of information. Such would be widely available to everyone sharing the info-stream with police and other guardians of social order. Humanity had now the responsibility to make the best of it. Brin stated, “it is already far too late to prevent the invasion of cameras and databases. The eagle cannot be crammed back into its bottle. No matter how many laws are passed, it will prove quite impossible to legislate away the new surveillance tools and databases. They are here to stay.”

Not so fast. In “Tools and Weapons,” authors Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne agree that astonishing technological gurus are indeed a fait accompli. Yet the question of privacy rights is a most urgent matter, not to be ignored or trivialized. The subject demands a scrupulous examination and practical programs to ensure its integrity.

President of Microsoft, Smith is the company’s longest-serving executive. The New York Times refers to him as “a de facto ambassador for the technology industry at large.” Browne is senior director of communications and external relations.

Smith is the narrator in this wide-ranging and measured reflection on compelling topics involving the threat and promise of high-tech developments. The authors ask, “As technology continues to advance, can the world control the future it is creating?” A seminal interregnum. But let us not presume naively that “the world” means all of the human family are invited to tables where momentous discussions happen and decisions of planetary consequence are made. Most of the people of this earth are superfluous to these conversations. Their opinions are not solicited in debates involving political, academic and corporate wielders of power.

To give Smith his due, he provides those who peruse his offering a peek into places where potent deliberations take place. He writes of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the need for an ethical framework to ensure the humane application of that powerful and transformative technology. He writes of his meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican, and AI was the topic at hand. As they parted, Francis urged Smith, “Keep your humanity.” Smith describes the disruptive capability of cyber-weaponry. In 2017, a cyberattack erupted in the U.K. and Spain, disabling hundreds of thousands of computers as it tore through more than 150 countries. The infection was named WannaCry. It served as a disturbing wake-up call for the world.

Originaly developed by the U.S. National Security Agency — for its own covert purposes — the code was pilfered and put on the black market by a nebulous crew called Shadow Brokers. Evidently their raison d’etre is to raise internet havoc. The virus was traced to North Korea.

The first cyberwar episode occurred in Estonia in 2007, “a digital siege called a denial-of-service attack that froze much of the country’s internet, including sites that powered Estonia’s government services and economy. The world suspected Russia.” Ten years later, Russia was again suspected as the culprit behind the starting “NotPetya” attack, which crippled the Ukraine and ran riot beyond that beleaguered nation, “infiltrating multinationals including FedEX, Merck, and Maersk. The Danish shipping giant saw its entire world-wide computer network grind to a halt.”

For a long time the high-tech community eschewed any idea of government regulation. The motto “Move Fast and Break Things” was a ubiquitous mindset among the elite dirigists. That attitude has changed, and Smith has been most vocal in an effort to call for a “Digital Geneva Convention” that would provide guidelines for the decent implementation of innovative technologies and protection of civil populations. In 2018, Microsoft worked closely with the French government and President Emmanuel Macron in crafting the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace. The Paris Call garnered widespread support. The U.S. government did not weigh in. Though mostly symbolic, these efforts must continue to be made to ameliorate real threats posed by nefarious applications of cyber techs.

As the world awaits the remission of the coronavirus, the invasive pathogens has reminded the Earth’s populations of the interdependence of human beings and the fragile realities of planetary society. Despite the rise of autocrats and nationalistic chauvinism, evolving technologies are everywhere, making our world an ever-smaller place. Yet, with the pernicious and destabilizing reach of COVID-19, governments of all stripes attempt more sway over their populations. Last month (March 2020), according to The New York Times, “leaders across the globe are invoking executive powers and seizing virtually dictatorial authority with scant reservation.” Quoted in 2019, Smith opined, “There are days in which one can be pessimistic about the future, and on the darkest days, one can even say that ultimately things are better, but sometimes they get really, really bad before they improve.” The challenges of AI, the power of Big Data as well as social inequality and ecological deterioration are an unprecedented amalgam. “Tools and Weapons” is a worthy compilation of one man’s perspective on our uncertain times.
THE MIDDLE GROUND  |  By Sam Day

You get a postal service! And you get a postal service! Everyone gets a postal service!

I want to talk about some other anxieties besides the Big C, for a change.

That USPS might fold in June is scary. I rarely get mail that matters to me anymore, but there are some serious problems with the end of postal service.

For one thing, we are in a pandemic. I know — I made it sound at the start like I wouldn’t bring up that Big C. But, one of the great things we have going for us here in Washington state is we can already vote by mail. We’ve been doing it for years, we’re good at it, and we don’t have to switch over to it in the middle of a campaign. It’s right there, waiting for us.

Unless Trump succeeds in prevent- ing the U.S. Postal Service from continuing in business.

If so, how will the August and No- vember elections play out here? Are we not going to be able to expect that we can already vote by mail? Everyone gets a postal service! Everyone gets a postal service! Everyone gets a postal service.

Anitra "intimate of tomato plants" Freeman and I are now living in an apartment with a northwest exposure. It gets about three hours of sunlight a day. I don’t think we’re going to be growing tomatoes in the living room any time soon — by “we,” of course I mean Anitra. I couldn’t grow a dandelion.

The news scares me with stories of meat plants shutting down, farmers leaving produce to rot in their fields and dairy producers pouring milk down drains. The federal government isn’t stepping in because it’s all just a sign of your benevolent free market at work. The market is your supreme being. It always does what’s best. That’s why Seattle’s economy is so great for everyone who lives here.

Have you ever wondered why Idaho is so famous for potatoes? I’ll tell you. When the first settlers got to Idaho and saw what kind of land they had to grow crops on, they all shrugged and said, “I guess we’ll be growing potatoes.”

Anitra has apparently sublimated her food anxieties. This past week, she dug up a slew of old Irish recipes for potatoes, onions and cabbages. It’s like we’re practicing for the next famine.

Actually this is an ongoing thing with her. She has also trained up as a local plant forager. She can walk four or five blocks down a residential street carrying a basket and at the end, it will be full of a day’s worth of salad. She’s especially good at spotting edible flowers.

Food banks are dealing with COVID-19 by boxing non-perishables so people don’t have to wait in line. Some are having most people drive up to the food bank and pop their trunks open so a box of staples can be loaded in back, and they can drive off without ever having to risk exchanging infections. It’s great for people who have cars and kitchens.

For homeless people, I guess it’s going to be boxed meals passed out once or twice a day at various locations by people in hazmat outfits.

Another anxiety I have concerns bureaucracy. Crises like these breed bureaucratic responses, and bureaucrat- ies get the right to do what they believe is the right thing.

When last on state welfare, I had a “counselor” with the Department of Social and Health Services Bottom of Form who advised me I was spending too much on food. “You should buy in bulk.” So I said, where do I put it? I’m home- less. She said, “get a station wagon.” I said, with what money? The money I save from not eating one month? I asked to see her supervisor. I was told, “no, we don’t do that,” and after I asked to see the supervisor’s boss, I was per- manently banned from all in-person consultations at DSHS.

I anxiously await a repeat of that in the near future.

Oscar Rosales

COVID-19 lays systemic racism and classism bare

As we near the month and a half mark since Gov. Jay Inslee issued the order to close non-essential services, we have a better idea of how preparation and infrastructure have impacted the effectiveness of the COVID-19 response.

Early action to doubt ameliorated conditions for many, and we count ourselves fortunate relative to other, harder-hit states. This, of course, as we bear in mind the undermining federal response that is comically terrible at best and grotesquely heartless and devoid of human consideration at worst.

One sobering reality that was unearthed at the local and national levels is how institutional racism and classism have coalesced in an unholy mix, ever-fester- ing in our so- ciety’s utter disdain for people of color and poor people. COVID-19 infection rates and casualties point to infrastructural neglect and de facto practice that leave socially and economically marginalized communities in perpetual fear for their health and economic survival.

The first analysis of confirmed COVID-19 cases in King County offers a glimpse of the pandemic’s impact. Per early results from Seattle & King County Public Health, African Americans (7.5 percent versus their 6.4 percent of the population), Latinos (17.1 percent vs. 10 percent) and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders (1 percent vs. 0.8 percent) were disproportionately im- pact ed relative to their populations in the county. Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and Latinos account for the highest rates per 100,000 cases.

The Washington State Department of Health also offered initial findings that illustrate that Latinos (28 percent vs. 13 percent) and African Americans (7 percent vs. 4 percent) are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 infection relative to their state population. These results point to systemic factors that place these com- munities at higher risk of infection. I cannot say I am shocked by these early results as they appear to be consistent with data sets emerging across the country.

Reports throughout the country echo a similar dynamic. In New York City, African Americans and Latinos account for 61.4 per- cent of COVID-19 deaths, per the New York City Health Department. Health disparities coupled with institutional racism have cre- ated an environment that disproportionately affects these two communities.

The precariousness of economic cir- cumstance also factors in. Many people are without the luxury of working from home and are at higher risk of exposure in essential jobs. These communities, and poor people in general, encounter the need to continue working to pay for necessities as institutional support is taut at best at the federal level.

This is important to consider as states debate economic reopening.

Access to personal protective equipment and adequate compensation for hazardous conditions is not only a labor rights issue, but a civil rights issue as well. May Day this year will have a different tenor. It is about life or death.
Streaming to stay sane
Almost all King County events are canceled, so we're listing streaming events for optimal physical distancing.

Fridays through May 1
An Evening with Neuroscience
7 p.m., YouTube stream at link, free tinyurl.com/yuorubr

An Evening with Neuroscience is an event to celebrate your remarkable brain. The brain, with its 66 billion neurons, is often misunderstood and taken for granted. This event invited neuroscientists, researchers, psychologists and clinicians to gather and discuss the brain mysteries and curious.

Tuesdays, Thursdays
Tales for the Time Being, tinyurl.com/yaownubr

7 p.m., register at link, donations appreciated, tinyurl.com/ydjkjg56

Feeling like you've watched pretty much all of Netflix? Well, rent amazing movies to the newly renovated Burke Museum.

Ongoing
SIFT Virtual Cinema
$10-12, access via link tinyurl.com/ybwh6oup

Looking for a way to spice up your night? Many of us know Canis as that extremely high-end restaurant perched on Queen Anne, but now you should know it as the source of your evening mood music. Canis is streaming a pianist nightly Monday to Friday from their empty dining room. The pianists are all beyond talented and often play modern pieces with a twist. There is something so lovely about listening to live piano, and now you can do it from your own living room, where no one can even judge you for eating mac and cheese or microwaved burritos. If you're looking for a classy dinner to match the music and ambiance, though, Canis is offering slightly more affordable family meal deliveries, or you could pick up from a favorite local spot of yours.
PRISON Continued from Page 4
to the crimes they purport to punish, are embroiled with the belief that a person is incapable of change. Considering life sentences say you’re going to be behind prison walls forever no matter what you do,” according to Blair’s lawyer Ellis, who has historically repre-
se nted clients fighting for leniency. “And yet despite that, Ms. Blair has found the determination to change her life.”

Six months ago, Ellis signed on to appeal Blair’s first strike, which she ob-
tained as a juvenile, after being contacted by the ACLU and the Innocence Project Northwest. The Portland-based criminal defense attorney agreed to litigate the case through the Washington Court of Appeals. Ellis came to believe that her conviction was improperly counted as a strike on her record. Plus, their initial conversations convinced Ellis that Blair’s change was “the real deal.”

“The person who struck out deserved to go to prison, but Ms. Blair was not the same person now. She poses no risk to society — only a benefit,” said Ellis. Blair’s transforma-
tion shows what happens when our criminal justice system pri-
orizes rehabilitative measures, Ellis said. But her case also shows the importance of reevaluating sen-
tence laws that lock away people for life are no longer valid.

“The Legislature decided second degree robbery was not serious enough of a crime to be in-
cluded as a strike,” Ellis said. Ellis said that Blair’s case was cited among others as a reason to eliminate second degree robbery from the three strikes list. But she and 63 other similarly-
situated people do not benefit from its removal.

Darneille, D-Tacoma. She has spent more than 40 years in the Legislature, but confronting mass incarceration is a task all her colleagues look at it, the more troubling it is.”

“Mandatory life sentences say you’re inimical for them away for life with no opportunity to have a re-
satisfaction. We both say ‘Consider yourself for Darneille, an thon for Darneille, what’s been a two-
dee robbery. Blair serving life without parole as a result of second-
degree robbery. It’s all part of what’s been a two-
decades-long mara-
thon for Darneille, who has to balance both her belief in a justice system that acknowledges po-
tential for human transformation and the desires of vic-
tims’ families for a satisfactory punish-
ment.

“Victims’ trag-
edies are as fresh and clear as day,” she said. “One really feels the end is nigh. One really feels the end is nigh. One really feels the end is nigh.

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ment.

“We have to have a willingness to see the nuance and take responsibility for the impact and harm of those [past] policies.”
— State Senator Rebecca Saldaña

CENSUS Continued from Page 3

“A lot of the plans that organizations had included significant mass meetings and public events that they can’t do. It’s an open question how soon they’ll be able to do that again,” Baldwin said.

The issue is compounded because many marginalized groups don’t have consistent internet access and 2020 is the first year that people are encouraged to fill out their census forms online. The coronavirus has closed places like librar-
ies where people could access the internet and other services if they didn’t have it at home.

The timing was somewhat fortunate in that much of the work around training and messaging had already been done, Bald-
win said, hopeful that work will result in high response rates without people going door to door, which could be a problem while the pandemic is still raging.

Of course, the coronavirus outbreak has also impacted census data collection.

The Census Bureau suspended field data collection in March with the inten-
tion to open offices again at the beginning of June. In-person activities that involve interaction with the public, such as en-
umeration, office work and processing, will stick to the most current guidance.

Census dates have also been extended. Under the new plan, online and mailed response forms were expected between March 12 and July 31. Those dates have been extended another three months to Oct. 31.

Even with the coronavirus challenges, Washington is outperforming other states when it comes to census responses. In general, Washington has had a relatively high response rate. According to the Census Bureau, 55.4 percent of Washingtonians have filled out the census compared to 49.8 percent of the nation. King County’s response rate was even higher at 59.8 percent. If you still need to fill out the census and have access to the internet, check your mail and see if your individual code has been mailed to you.

The survey that has not responded will receive another notice in April, according to the Census Bureau. 
FOOD Continued from Page 7

harvesting, but that isn’t the case lately. With a handful of staff and volunteers, EFN is supplying fresh produce in their pre-packed boxes.

Something else is happening, too. People want to grow food in their own yards and on their windowills—wherever they can play with light and space.

“I think people can take action,” Douglas said. “There is an opportunity … to grow food for yourself, for our neighbors, and food for your food bank. Right now, we are asking you to take pressure off the system to bring more food into the system.”

Douglas says EFN is also working to get plant starts to people who want to start their own gardens.

Community-centered urban farms, like Nurturing Roots, are seeing a trend toward home farming as well.

Standing outside amidst growing saplings and shoots, green foliage and fresh soil at Nurturing Roots farm can provide an island of calm. “For a moment, you also get to heal listening to the outside world,” Clark said.

Many people leave the farm feeling uplifted.

The response to COVID-19 has to be equitable, Clark said, providing everyone with access to each stage of food production. So far, that is not the case.

Growing inequity

When infrastructure falls through, the disparities between those who can and can’t afford things like toilet paper and fresh produce are unmistakable. The system will not provide for vulnerable populations, communities of color, food-insecure households and those who have historically been sidelined.

“This has drawn a major magnifying glass on the fact that individuals need to be self-sufficient.” Clark said. “Self-sufficiency is something our community lacks.”

The way Clark sees it, as businesses shutter and the pace of life slows to a trickle, people are left with time they didn’t have before. Now, they want to start cultivating their own gardens and nourishment.

She is making take-home boxes for people who can’t participate in the farm’s spring activities. The boxes will have cards in different languages with instructions on how to plant seeds and harvest crops, along with materials to get started.

Nurturing Roots is also working with Clean Greens based in the Central District to bring fresh affordable produce to food-insecure households with CSA subscription boxes at a subsidized price.

These kinds of actions, whether buying from local farms or taking initiative to cultivate one’s own garden, create an opportunity not just for reliable and secure food sources but a societal shift in how we think about food access.

COVID-19 is revealing the necessity of such a shift. It is one that needs to happen upstream as well, Sipos said, on a timeline that looks beyond the current crisis. When we grow locally, we become part of our own food supply chains, which allows for decision-making and action. Food sovereignty is vital when the system falls apart.

PANTRY Continued from Page 5

case they had to replace it.

But that didn’t happen.

The pantry and library aren’t completely without problems. Kids have come by a few times with acts of mischief, like dumping a jar of tomato sauce in the pantry. When that happened, Kelly Norton went out to talk to them and ask them for help cleaning up, which they did.

The pantry is meant to keep the community together, to support one another in times of need. People who frequent it also donate when their situations are better, stocking it with nonperishable goods, the Nortons said.

That is part of the goal of the project: bringing people together to try to combat larger societal problems, said Jessica McClard, founder of the Little Free Pantry movement.

“It’s a desire for reconnection to one’s neighbors and an intentional creation of space for neighborliness at a time that we are less connected,” McClard said.

McClard was inspired by the Little Free Library effort, much like the Nortons. It led her to think what else could happen in those small, wooden boxes.

“I took the Little Free Library as a model and read about the experience of those stewards,” McClard said. “Even at that time, I saw there was some contention around those projects. It didn’t really seem like the risk was enough to outweigh what could potentially be the good that could come from doing this.”

That was four years ago. Now there are hundreds of little free pantries across the U.S., helping people out and bringing communities together.

“It’s been a positive experience,” Kelly Norton said.