

# PERSPECTIVE

## How we learned to say thanks

◆ By LISA MCGINLEY ◆



With the Capitol building in the background, people gather around the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington following a 1985 Memorial Day ceremony.

LANA HARRIS/AP PHOTO

The experience of the unthanked generation — Vietnam veterans — taught Americans that we are in debt to those performing the most dangerous jobs.

EVERY EVENING at shift change time for New York City hospitals, people isolating in their apartments open the windows and clap for the health care workers who are leaving their jobs for the day — those dangerous, unstinting hours of treating desperately ill COVID-19 patients.

New Yorkers have found this way to say thank you from afar. They signal their gratitude and admiration which, while it doesn't make the medical workers any safer or less exhausted, sends a supremely important message: We know what you are sacrificing, we know you are

doing it on our behalf, and we want you to know that we know.

The outpouring for nurses and doctors copies the public gratitude and honor that Americans now customarily pay to military service members when they return from deployment. Since the Gulf War and through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and anywhere that Americans serve, a welcome ceremony awaits them on return. Both the medical and the military personnel are standing in for us, and by thanking them we force ourselves to admit it.

For Vietnam veterans it was not

that way, as we know. But now that most are in their seventies and among the age group most threatened by this pandemic, it seems they have performed one more service for their country. They did it by serving as living reminders to the nation that it had failed to appreciate or honor their sacrifices or adequately care for them as they suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Agent Orange illnesses and other afflictions of mind and body.

When the shabby treatment they received was no longer deniable and its after-effects shadowed the lives of many of them, Americans woke up to

the realization that it stemmed from the utter failure to recognize their service in an unpopular war. It was too late for timely thanks to the Vietnam vets, but we could ever after thank those who followed them.

Wars come in many forms; the present struggle to beat down the coronavirus and save lives is being waged in hospitals and laboratories. Its foot soldiers include emergency responders, delivery drivers, grocery and pharmacy and warehouse employees, and anyone contributing in any way to public safety. That includes the ones who stay home, keep-

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### The Day should not publicize nonsense

After reading The Day's article "East Lyme demonologists to be featured on Travel Channel," (March 21), I now realize why the media has such a tough time dealing with the Liar-in-Chief in Washington. Not once in this rather lengthy article is it even hinted that the "demonologists" in question might just be frauds. Instead we are treated to a passel of nonsense about demons and ghosts, all of which is presented by your reporter as fact, certified by self-proclaimed experts in the paranormal.

I suppose an intelligent person might believe this drivle, assum-

ing said intelligent person was living in Medieval times when such notions were imposed on a susceptible and superstitious population. I had thought the consensus of informed opinion had moved beyond such hogwash. If a supposedly respectable media source such as The Day can't call this sort of thing out for what it is, when it is peddled by unknowns, it's easy to see why the media has such a tough time calling out the daily mendacity oozing out of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

**John Wirzbicki**  
**Groton**

#### National health care did not do better

European-style health-care systems are not the answer.

The Day recently published the opinion of a local doctor that advocated single-payer or European-style pluralistic systems as "better" for dealing with emergencies like the COVID-19 outbreak, "Local doctor: COVID-19 exposes weaknesses of health care, leader-

ship," (March 23).

A look at the results in Europe, particularly Italy and Spain (where packed hospitals are treating patients on the floors of hallways), show that European-style systems are not the answer.

**P.J. Rovero**  
**East Lyme**

#### Call the virus by scientific name

I have never heard of residents of Lyme or any other town in Connecticut being blamed for Lyme Disease, but I have heard of Chinese residents or even non-Chinese with Asian features being blamed for COVID-19. Few Americans can tell the difference between someone from Wuhan and someone from Taiwan or Seoul or Tokyo or many other Asian countries, let alone Americans of Asian descent. Yet Chinese restaurants have been shunned and people

with Asian features attacked.

Language does matter; and not only is "Wuhan Flu" (or "Chinese Flu") an incorrect name for COVID-19, but such names enmesh courage blaming residents of a certain region. There's no legitimate reason to call COVID-19 a Chinese problem; it's worldwide regardless of where it was first identified.

**Elizabeth Ring**  
**New London**

#### No one forced to read differing opinions

All those readers who write letters indignant about Lee Elci and The Day running his weekly column seem to not believe in diversity of opinion or freedom of expression. For them I have a simple solution. Don't read him. I am sure there are others who agree with Lee and enjoy his writings. That way The Day can accommodate a spectrum of opinion and not just be a partisan sheet.

**Bill Schmidt**  
**New London**

#### As crisis continues, don't hoard supplies

We are writing on behalf of so many of our friends and neighbors who are having trouble finding basic supplies, food and over-the-counter medicines like Tylenol and Motrin for themselves and their children. We have always been a country that has plenty to spare and it is astonishing and sickening to see empty shelves. This is a time to pull together and take care of each other. Senior citizens should not have to have special hours set aside just so they can grocery shop without being subjected to difficulties over a simple shopping trip. Mothers of children who need Motrin for fever shouldn't find empty store shelves.

Please end this fearful hoarding of supplies. It only comes at the expense of your neighbors and, remember, it might be you someday who is in need of something basic that has suddenly become impossible to find. Try a little common sense and charity and pay it forward.

**Julie and John Leese**  
**Groton**

## Earth Day 50 in the age of virus, climate change

By JUDY BENSON

EARTH DAY 2020 promised to be a significant event. This Wednesday, April 22, marks the 50th anniversary of a special day set aside to promote appreciation and conservation of nature, and a more conscientious approach to consumption.

Mystic Seaport led planning for a major celebration on April 18 that would involve some two dozen local groups, including Connecticut Sea Grant. At the University of Connecticut Avery Point campus, the EcoHusky Club planned to host activities Wednesday for students and the community. Sea Grant would be part of that, too.

Like so many other plans, though, the ones made for Earth Day have been swept aside by coronavirus. But that doesn't mean the reason for the events should be forgotten. Perhaps, it's more relevant than ever.

Lately, as I take respite walks from my computer screen and rare excursions in my car for necessary trips, the 2007 bestseller "The World Without Us" comes to mind. Alan Weisman's book is hard to categorize — the New York Times called it a "nonfiction eco-thriller." As I pass empty playgrounds, shuttered schools and lifeless shopping centers, I think about Weisman's descriptions of how nature would retake the landscape if humans were to suddenly disappear, and of the toxic legacy we would leave behind. It's sobering and strangely hopeful at the same time, as it explores nature's great capacity to heal itself — to a point.

The great pandemic of 2020 will surely yield many lessons along with all the tragedy. I hope that one of them is a deeper understanding of

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the human relationship with nature. We are animals, after all, vulnerable to deadly epidemics just like other living species — American chestnuts and the blight, bats and white nose syndrome, and West Nile virus and crows are just three examples. As domesticated and technologically advanced as we have become, we are still subject to the powers of nature. Some of these provide solace and inspiration, and some bring disaster and death. We might benefit as a species from greater humility about our place on the planet, taking better care to live as part of nature rather than above it.

That brings me to the biggest environmental challenge of our age — climate change. Decades of fossil fuel emissions have altered the delicate chemistry of Earth's atmosphere that made life possible. Humans and all other modern species evolved before the accumulation of all that excess carbon dioxide, and whether and how we and other plants and animals adapt to the resulting warmer, more volatile climate remains an open question.

But, just like with coronavirus, figuring out how to survive this reality means first acknowledging our vulnerability. To slow the pandemic, behavior changes and economic

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