



# Munro Institute Newsletter

Ralph Munro Institute for Civic Education  
Western Washington University  
Department of Political Science, MS 9082  
Bellingham WA 98225

Winter 2021, VOL. 4

## From the Director

Professor Vernon “Damani” Johnson



Let me begin by offering an apology for not publishing the Munro Institute Newsletter during the fall of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us. For the institute the pandemic meant postponing our series of panels commemorating the passage of the 19th Amendment from the spring to October 2020. Those

panels, along with our annual Munro Seminar, made for a busy fall quarter. With our attention devoted to programming, the newsletter fell by the wayside.

Before going any further, I want to share that I am retiring this coming June, after 35 years of teaching, research and service to the Western community. I will also step down as director of the Munro Institute after six years in the position. The years at the helm of the institute have been some of the most rewarding in my career. As someone who came up through the liberal tradition of the civil rights movement I have been and remain frustrated by the growing political polarization in our country. However, as an educator I am committed to active debate of the issues from all sides to achieve consensus on the pressing issues of our time.

In Ralph Munro I encountered a Republican who is deeply humane and has a profound commitment to public service. I recall being in Olympia with him as legislators from both sides of the aisle would come up to pay their respects. Perhaps more impressive to me were the people of color who worked in state agencies, or were long-time civil rights activists that he greeted genially, and with a

certain ease. This was the mark of a man who had accrued the social capital to communicate across the political and cultural divisions that plague our country. The mission statement of the institute seeks to honor Ralph’s example as it “offers students, teachers and community members an opportunity to work with professors, activists and political leaders to learn how local, state and national politics develop.” As a former elected official, Ralph has engaged activists and politicians to find ways to bridge the gap between aspirations and policy outcomes, and his contributions to the institute are manifold. Working with him has helped me build my own repertoire for meeting the challenges this country faces today.

Over the last six years we have endeavored to expand the institute’s visibility via the annual fall Munro Seminar. In 2016 we bolstered the fall Seminar by inviting a nationally known keynote speaker to give an address in downtown Bellingham the night before the panels on campus. The keynote event has been an excellent way to draw the community to institute programs. We also began to collaborate with other campus and community organizations on programs throughout the rest of the school year. Some highlights have been the 2019 Alumnus-in-Residence program featuring Obama White House staffer Jesse Moore (in conjunction with the Karen Morse Institute for Leadership); and the series of events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment (with the League of Women Voters).

Ralph Munro, thank you for establishing the institute, and thank you to Western’s political science department for supporting me in building up the institute over the years. It’s been a good ride!



# 2020 in Review

## A Day on Capitol Hill

Over the President's Day Weekend, February 16-17, the institute collaborated with the Political Science Association to take 12 political science students for a "Day on Capitol Hill" field trip. The program began with a dinner at Ralph Munro's home on the 16th. Special guests for the evening included Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Stevens, and State Senators Keith Wagoner (R-39th District, Sedro Wooley) and John McCoy (D-38th District, Tulalip). On the 17th the day was spent at the Capitol visiting legislators and other public officials. A highlight of the day was meeting Washington Supreme Court Justice Raquel-Montoya Lewis, a former faculty member in the Law, Diversity and Justice Program at Fairhaven College. We also visited with our two state representatives from the 42nd District, Luanne Van Werven (R) and WWU economics faculty Sharon Shewmake (D). The Institute financed the costs of food, lodging and transportation for the trip. Thanks to advisory committee member Professor Kate Destler for accompanying the group for the excursion. Thanks also to Becca Kenna-Schenk, WWU Executive Director of Government Relations and her assistant, Elissa Hicks, for setting up the fast-moving itinerary over the day and a half.



Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Stevens, and State Senator Keith Wagoner address students at Ralph Munro's home.

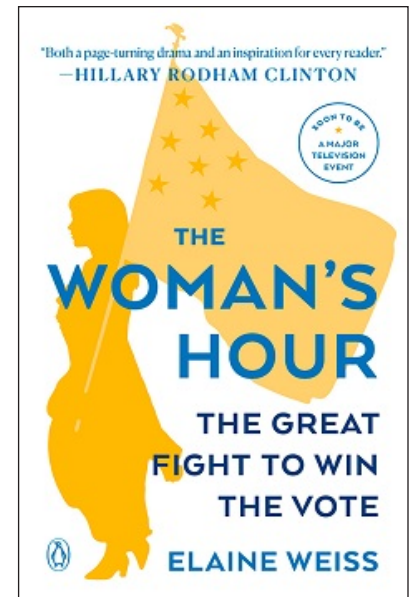
## 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment Celebrations

Back in the summer of 2018 the institute accepted the Bellingham/Whatcom County chapter of the League of Women Voters' invitation to co-sponsor a series of programs to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment of the US Constitution extending the right to vote to women. The kick-off event in February was around a proclamation issued by Secretary of State, Kim Wyman in Bellingham honoring the centennial of the founding of the League of Women Voters. On February

27 there was a lecture by Elaine Weiss, author of *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*. She delivered an engaging lecture to an audience of 250-300 people at the Performing Arts Center on Western's campus. Her visit was also co-sponsored with Village Books, in Bellingham.

In the spring we had scheduled a series of lectures and conversations entitled "Toward a More Perfect Democracy," which sought to elevate struggles over voting rights and other institutional challenges faced by other historically marginalized (primarily racial) groups. COVID forced the postponement of those events, but we rallied to pull off two webinar panels in October. "Imperfect Democracy: Exploring Historical and Contemporary Threats to the Franchise and Political Voice," (October 6) and "Making our Voices Heard" (October 13). The panels drew upon a combination of community activists, government officials and scholars in animated exchanges. They were moderated by Western Washington University Political Science professor Kate Destler.

Special thanks are due to Professors Kate Destler



continued to page 3



Top: Secretary of State Kim Wyman shared remarks about voting access



Below: Kate Destler

and Vicki Hsueh of our political science department and the institute advisory committee; and to Jill Bernstein, Judy Hopkinson, Annette Holcombe and all of those from the Bellingham-Whatcom County League of Women Voters who participated in pulling off this remarkable series of programs.

The “Toward a More Perfect Democracy” videos can be viewed on the Munro Institute website @ <https://chssdepts.wwu.edu/political-science/news-and-events>.

## Munro Seminar 2020

When the committee to organize the annual Munro Seminar met in the spring to discuss the fall program, we quickly decided that we had to focus on the impact of COVID-19 in Washington.



Top: Alastair Roberts  
Below: Kyle Harper

We felt nothing would be more timely than to theme our fall seminar around “Institutional Stresses in a Time of Pandemic.” This year we held a “keynote conversation” around that theme on October 27th. Moderated by institute director Vernon Johnson, it featured two nationally known scholars: Alastair Roberts, Professor of Public Policy and Director, School of Public Policy, at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst; and Kyle Harper, Professor of Classics &

Letters from the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Roberts has written widely, about the challenges to government from the time of 9-11 to the COVID crisis. Dr. Harper is an authority on institutional performance and stress during the Roman Empire and is currently writing a global history of infectious disease.

The next day we held two follow-up panels: “Federalism, Bureaucracy And Lessons On “Managing” A Pandemic and “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Washington’s Latino Population.” They brought together state and local officials with community organizers and internationally-recognized scholars to understand the policy challenges presented by COVID-19 in Washington State and nationwide. Participants of each panel follow for your information. All seminar videos can found on the institute website @ <https://chssdepts.wwu.edu/political-science/ralph-munro-seminar-civic-education>.

### PANEL DISCUSSION #1: BUREAUCRACY, FEDERAL & STATES RIGHTS PANEL

- Chris Reykdal, Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Don Kettl, University of Texas Austin
- Leo Flor, Director, King County Department of Community and Human Services
- Jae Moon, Yonsei University, South Korea
- *Moderator:* Kate Destler, WWU Associate Professor of Political Science

### PANEL DISCUSSION #2: THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WASHINGTON’S LATINX POPULATION

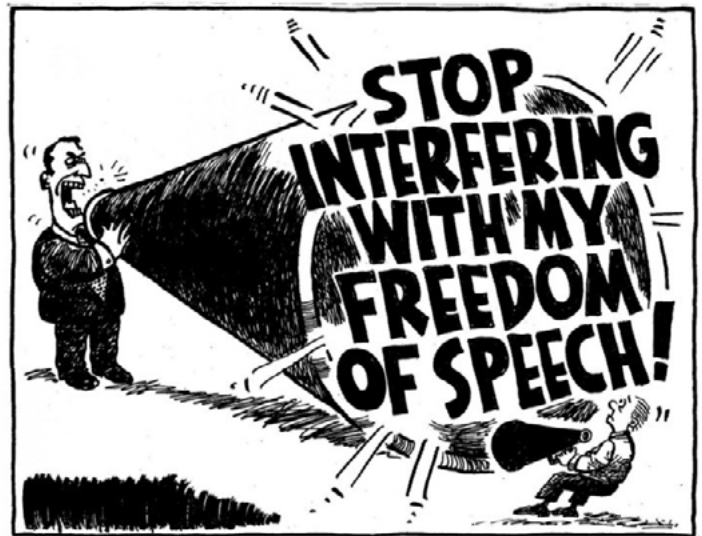
- Rebecca Saldana, Senator, 37th District
- Giovanni Severino, Lead Policy Organizer, Latino Community Fund of Washington
- Mike Gempler, Executive Director, Washington Growers League
- Norma Chavez, Director, Washington Office of Agricultural and Seasonal Workforce Services
- *Moderator:* Rudy Alamillo, WWU Assistant Professor of Political Science

# Preview of 2021

## Programs for the Winter and Spring of 2021

In keeping with the fundraising pitch of fiscal year 2018-19, we plan to initiate a Seeking Common Ground series of lectures/panels/conversations. The aim is to feature scholars and civic activists who represent multiple sides of pressing policy issues. Today we live in a highly polarized society. Our differences are exacerbated by a social media environment in which people find their fellow travelers, get increasingly agitated about their political opponents and lose sight of any common ground upon which they might move forward. Freedom of speech is heralded in the First Amendment of the Constitution and some people on all sides of issues feel they can say whatever they please, however offensive or baseless, about their adversaries. The founders supported free speech, because they believed that in the contestation over ideas, the best ideas would stand up in the debate and eventually be embraced by most citizens. Sadly, in a society that is racially and ideologically divided where people are holed up in their trenches and lob verbal barrages across the divide, reasoned and civil debate is in short supply.

To address these concerns, we have started our first round of Seeking Common Ground with focused discussions about the importance and challenge of sustaining free speech and civil discourse on university campuses. In planning sessions that bring together university faculty, staff and student leaders, we have begun to develop a training for students on how to facilitate difficult conversations and are considering developing a certificate-granting program based on the idea that civil discourse is not just a value, but also a skill that one can put on their resume. The kick-off of Seeking Common Ground could involve an event featuring a speaker. Stay tuned for more developments!



Bram Wanrooij, "Does Free Speech Exist? Can an unequal society really guarantee everyone's right to be heard?"  
<https://medium.com/nine-by-five-media/does-free-speech-exist-6a18d9fbf545>

## Virtual Day on Capitol Hill 2021

The success of last winter's Day on Capitol Hill left us eager to provide the opportunity for another cohort of Western students to engage with state policymakers, staff members and advocates. While COVID-19 has prevented any of us from venturing to Olympia in person, we are developing an on-line version that will provide students and lawmakers with the opportunity to connect in a series of on-line meetings and panels once the legislative session has come to a close.



**Institute director Vernon Johnson with interns Jake Piatok, Arianne Winter and Amanda Mai**



**Ralph Munro and political science student Cole Harvey on Capitol Hill**



NONPROFIT  
U S POSTAGE PAID  
WESTERN WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY

Department of Political Science  
Arntzen Hall 415, MS 9082  
516 High Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225

Please let us know if you prefer email over a paper newsletter at [Vernon.Johnson@wwu.edu](mailto:Vernon.Johnson@wwu.edu).

### Munro Institute Advisory Committee

- Keith Wagoner**, Washington State Senate, 39th District (R-Sedro Woolley)
- Becca Kenna-Schenk**, Director of Government-University Relations, Western Washington University
- Dr. Todd Donovan**, Whatcom County Council member, Professor of Political Science, WWU
- Dr. Vicki Hsueh**, Professor of Political Science, WWU
- Dr. Kate Destler**, Associate Professor of Political Science, WWU
- Dr. Paul Chen**, Associate Professor of Political Science, WWU

For more information about the Munro Institute and its activities, please see the Ralph Munro Institute home page at <https://chss.wwu.edu/political-science>, or contact Professor Vernon D. Johnson, the Munro Institute Director, at [Vernon.Johnson@wwu.edu](mailto:Vernon.Johnson@wwu.edu).

## Support the Munro Institute

Please support our sustainer's campaign at <https://foundation.wwu.edu/MunroEndowment>

### Ralph Munro Endowment for Civic Education

AF16 dept 6641000

Yes, I/We wish to support the Ralph Munro Endowment for Civic Education with a gift of:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (First Last)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street or PO Box

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Email

All gifts are tax-deductible as allowable by law. Upon processing of your gift a receipt will be sent to you from the WWU Foundation.

Help Western Go Green! Give online at [www.wwu.edu/give](http://www.wwu.edu/give)

Western Washington University Foundation • (360) 650-3027 • Fax (360) 650-2832 • Old Main 430  
MS 9034 • 516 High Street Bellingham, WA 98225

### Method of Payment

- My check made payable to WWU Foundation is enclosed.
- Please charge my:  Visa  Mastercard  Amex  Discover

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name as it appears on card

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Card Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Expiration Date 3-4 Digit CSC

Please email my receipt to:

I don't need a receipt (gifts of \$250 or more will always be receipted)