

## Resolution to the Trustees of Western Washington University to Right the Massive Historical Wrong Perpetrated on President Charles Fisher

Whereas, *Cascadia Daily News* Executive Editor Ron Judd recently published a public plea to correct the record on former Western Washington University President Charles Fisher (1923-1939).

Whereas, Ron Judd is a published authority on this subject: [The Liberal Arts on Trial: Charles H. Fisher and Red-Scare Politics at Western Washington College of Education, 1933-39](#) (University of Nebraska, 2016).

Whereas, “Within a dozen years, against great odds that included the throes of the Great Depression, the college's fourth president had largely succeeded, putting Bellingham and Western Washington on the national educational map ... set[ting] the path for little Whatcom Normal, a Bellingham institution since 1899, to grow into Western Washington University.”<sup>1</sup>

Whereas, “Fisher’s reward [was] an unwarranted, undeserved, unexplained firing by a trio of establishment men who then constituted the local college’s Board of Trustees. Fisher in the summer of 1939 was shown the door by the college after a yearslong shadowy campaign by right-wing local Bellingham residents and their usual-suspect associations, organized and fueled by Frank Sefrit, the general manager and editor of the local daily newspaper, *The Bellingham Herald*.”

Whereas, “Sefrit accused Fisher — a moderate, New Deal liberal by standards of his day — of being a rank-and-file communist, literally bent on turning America into a socialist nation by injecting a “virus” of collectivism into the minds of impressionable young teachers.”

Whereas, “Joining in this attack was a rump committee of local right-wing-leaning, shadow-dwelling, “pro-America” activists, among them a local minister, some prominent business people (including, the study revealed, philanthropist businesswoman [Frances Payne Larrabee](#), and Solomon Blanton Luther, a man who boasted of being a grand dragon of the local Ku Klux Klan.)”

Whereas, “Fisher’s life work was destroyed, his reputation permanently smeared. Blackballed from the education community he had loved to serve, Fisher died in 1965 at 84, a lonely, and in some respects, bitter man.”

Whereas, “Western has undergone a spate of historical reexaminations that have led to apologies, changes of course, and even renamings of buildings and programs considered inappropriate by modern standards.”

Therefore, be it resolved that the Whatcom Democrats urges the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University “to adopt a resolution owning up to its shameful mistreatment of Fisher, accepting responsibility for his improper firing and the smearing of his legacy. The 100th anniversary of the arrival of a man perhaps most responsible for the university’s current

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<sup>1</sup> For this and all subsequent quotes: <https://www.cascadiadaily.com/news/2023/jan/11/memo-to-wwu-its-past-time-to-correct-the-record-on-charles-fisher/>

inclusive, 'active-minds' bent is a worthy occasion to do what's long been needed: Right this massive historical wrong."

*Adopted by unanimous vote at the January 29 General Membership Meeting of Whatcom Democrats.*