

## Courts fail to mandate family communication

**OUR OPINION:** Most of the problems with American families cannot be fixed by judge and jury

If you want to actually see the breakdown of the American family (instead of just hearing about it), take a look at the nation's family courts.

Last week in Chicago, a family-court judge threatened to jail a 15-year-old girl and her 12-year-old brother because they refused to visit their father. The father said his rights are being violated. The children say they would rather go to jail than give in. The judge said the children are in contempt of court.

Is this really going to mend the rift between parent and child?

"Thanks for the lesson, Dad. How could I have misjudged your love for me?"

More and more, this nation is turning its personal problems over to the judicial system. Rather than finding compromises or accepting that we cannot control the actions of others, we take our loved ones (and ex-loved ones) to court. We've been hurt, and we want court-mandated justice.

The Chicago case illustrates an interesting paradox in American culture. Ever since the divorce boom of the 1980s, thousands of fathers have disappeared from their children's lives. Sociologists have begun to define this country as a fatherless society.

Yet, for all that paternal abandonment, no court has required a father to visit his children.

So it's perplexing why

this same judicial system would force children to fulfill their fathers' rights and abandon their own. If the parent has a right to determine with whom he associates, why shouldn't his teen-age child?

The 15-year-old daughter said she is mad at her father for abandoning the family. As such, the court forcing her to see him isn't going to resolve that issue or eliminate her pain. In fact, it will amplify her anger.

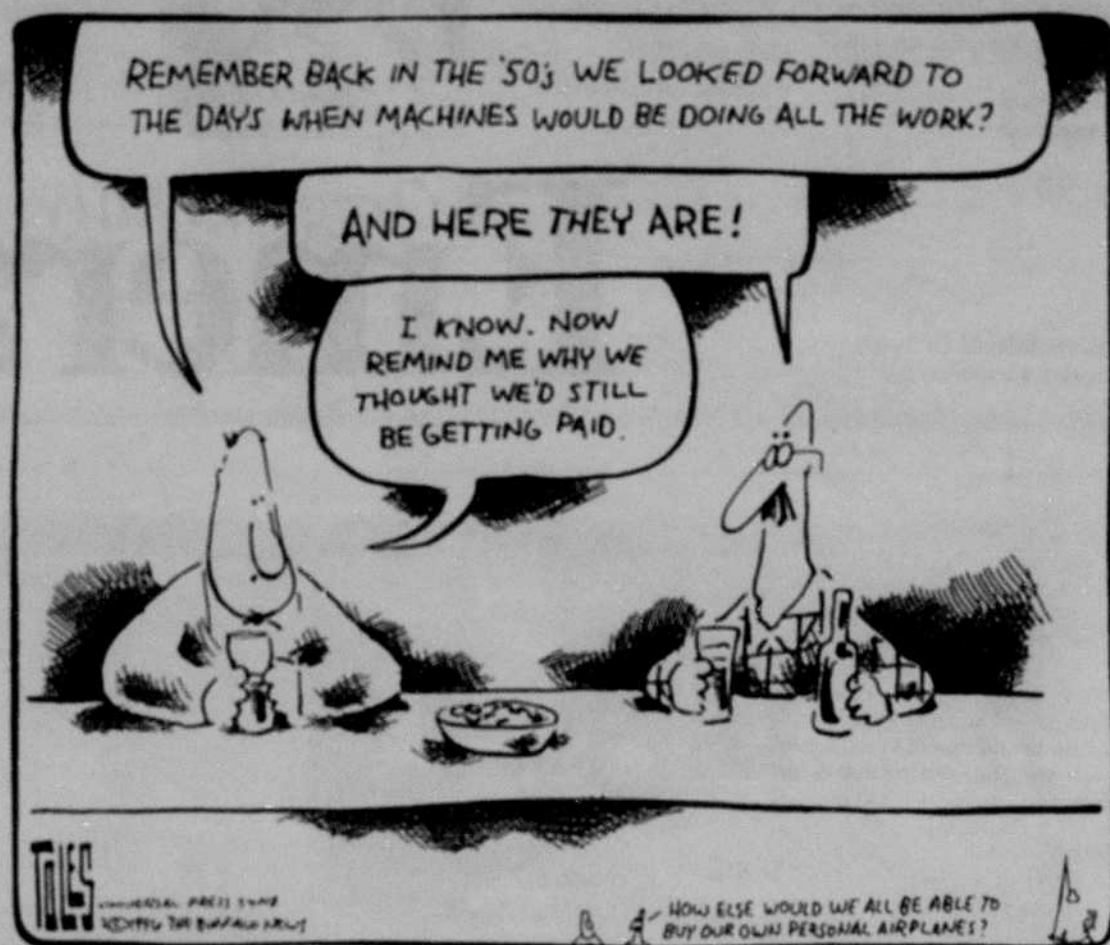
What the father is looking for cannot be dictated from the bench.

Children distance themselves from their parents everyday. Even living in the same house, teen-agers stop talking to their parents, disregard curfews and break rules. This part of growing up for most young adults cannot be resolved with tougher rules or screaming matches. Grounding a teen who hates being physically restricted will probably cause them to sneak out in the middle of the night.

Most problems in families (and the world) are caused by either an inability or an unwillingness of people to listen to one another. That's no surprise, but it seems to elude the wisdom of the court.

The court should require the children to attend individual counseling and then family counseling with their father. This way, the children will be able to resolve their feelings of abandonment and be able to express their feelings to their father in a productive way.

As it stands, no one is getting the one right that is most important: the right to be heard.



## Wage hike hurts needy, working poor

We all have them. Bad days, the blues — and teachers we just can't stand. In one of my first classes, I met a professor I couldn't comprehend.

I learned a lot in his class. About frustration, about self-reliance, but most importantly, about how a curve can change a dismal 56 percent into a B+. That's the thing about bell curves; you are rated not on your performance, but on the performance of your peers.

I found this professor's grading policy especially maddening; if the class challenged points given on any particular question, he would give all of us all the points.

Basically, it went like this:  
Class: "Hey, this is the right answer."  
Prof: "No, it isn't."  
Class: "Yes, it is."

Prof: "Fine, you all get ten extra points. Make that a hundred. No, a million. Everyone gets a million extra points. Happy?"

I'd look around the class astonished to see some faces satisfied with a well-fought battle. Others were not so pleased.

An increase in the minimum wage is a lot like that. Proponents of the minimum-wage increase argue that it puts more money into the hands that need it most: the working poor. They believe that giving all people earning only \$4.75 an hour a whopping \$6.50 an hour, gives those workers a full \$1.75 worth of extra buying power.

Unfortunately, this is where the term "chain reaction" becomes all too applicable. So, the lowest paid workers get \$1.75 more an hour. Many low paying jobs are in the service industry, so employers start looking at what is really a "needed" job. Some jobs would be almost immediately terminated.

Remember ushers at movie theaters?

Me neither. They were considered unnecessary labor after a minimum wage increase. I can only wonder what would be considered unnecessary labor now? Maybe the fry cooker at McDonald's — automation could take over that. People who work at skating rinks, concession stands and the like aren't usually there because their employer wants to give them a boost, but because their jobs are more efficiently done by humans than machines.

But, they argue, if the minimum wage was hiked up more than \$2 above the Federal minimum wage (\$4.25 per hour), people would be able to afford to give up that second job. They would be making enough money to get by on only one job.

Uh-huh, and Bill Gates will start working at Taco Bell because they offer such great employee benefits.

So, where would all this money come from? I may be going out on a limb here, but one thing I have noticed about business people is that they

like to make money, not lose it. In order to make the same amount of money, prices on services and goods provided by people affected by the minimum wage increase would have to be increased. This touches just about everything from gas to groceries.

If the minimum wage was increased that much, that quickly (from \$4.75 to \$6.50 by 1999 — ODE,

Feb. 8), we would see almost a direct correlation between the raise in wage and the raise in prices. The percentage costs would stay the same and the people employed by these low level jobs would only be hurt.

I suggest a more reasonable increase such as President Clinton's proposal. He proposes a 90 cent increase over two years to a federal level of \$5.15 per hour. This would only be a 40 cent increase in Oregon, but it would insure that great numbers of people would not come to Oregon searching for the higher minimum wage.

What scares me most is the rhetoric that the minimum wage increase will get people off welfare and reduce poverty. According to Bill Resnick (*The Oregonian*, Aug. 25, 1995), "At \$4.75 an hour, even with food stamps and the Earned Income Tax Credit, a three-person family with one minimum-wage earner lives below the poverty line. A raise to \$5.50 means \$1,500 per year more in wage income, raising that family above the poverty line. And nothing is more important to this country than reducing family and child poverty." What he fails to mention, is that due to cost inflation, the family will remain in the same dire need as before but may lose some assistance because they would no longer be considered poverty stricken.

The people making just above minimum wage (in the \$5.00-\$6.50 range) would lose out as their employers would probably simply raise them to the state mandated minimum wage.

As any economics book would tell you, a sudden influx of money does not bring prosperity, but mass inflation. When considering a raise of the minimum wage, it must be enough to honestly help the people receiving that wage, but not enough to place them right back where they were before — at the bottom. As the minimum wage reaches its all time buying power low in close to 40 years, we must rectify the situation. But a raise to \$6.50 would only make the situation worse. When the Minimum Wage Coalition comes knocking, tell them the truth — a minimum wage hike is a great idea, but a \$2.25 hike above the federal minimum wage will only hurt Oregon, starting with the state's poorest and most needy.

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