

Our View

Solutions for child care recovery

Rural Oregon is facing a difficult post-COVID economic recovery. The \$1.9 trillion federal coronavirus relief package will undoubtedly help, but without addressing some long-standing barriers to economic development, we will not grow and thrive.

The lack of child care is one of those barriers. We live in a child care desert, where the number of available slots is a fraction of the need.

Without adequate and affordable child care options for children younger than age 5, a laundry list of problems arises:

- Parents (women, mostly) who want to work or attend school may need to drop out of the workforce or college, harming their family's long-term economic future.
- Employers trying to recruit and retain employees have limited options, as potential workers are not available.
- A "brain drain" ensues, as professionals leave rural Oregon to pursue their careers in areas with more child care options.
- Rural school districts suffer from diminishing student enrollment year after year, as young families move away.
- When there are few preschool options, many 5 year olds are not ready to learn when they start kindergarten, which undermines their chances of future academic success.

A strong child care system is needed to solve these problems.

The Ford Family Foundation's recent report, "Child Care in Rural Oregon," charts a path to improve the quantity and quality of child care. Their five recommendations should be quickly enacted.

Their first recommendation is for the Oregon Department of Human Services to use data from surveys of child care providers across the state to accurately model the actual costs of providing child care, to calculate reimbursement rates that are fair across the state and don't put rural areas at a disadvantage.

Second, do away with the state's current system of paying more for child care in urban areas than is paid in rural areas, and permanently waive or significantly lower the co-payments for low-income families who receive child care assistance.

Third, recognize that both home-based child care providers and child care centers need consistent and reliable funding. They need to receive payments based on a child's enrollment rather than their daily attendance.

Fourth, launch a statewide system to link child care provider networks so that administrative services, such as bookkeeping and payroll, can be shared by home-based child care and child care centers across the state, lowering costs for all.

Fifth, make changes in Oregon's child care regulations to allow small child care centers to be located in nonresidential settings, so they can be licensed as "Certified Family Child Care." This would allow for mixed-age groups of up to 16 children in "micro-centers" in schools and other existing buildings.

These steps don't solve the underlying problem causing the shortage of child care: This care is expensive to provide because of the high caregiver-to-child ratios needed for the safety of very young children, and is not subsidized by the government except for very low-income families. The brunt of the cost of child care is primarily borne by families. For many families, child care costs more than their mortgage, and can be as high as college tuition.

Ultimately, we as a nation need to face the fact that a child's education does not start in kindergarten. It starts at birth, so the more tax dollars we spend on high-quality child care and education, the less we will spend on remedial services and social welfare systems, and the better off we will be in the long run.



Other Views

White House ignores border chaos



JOE GUZZARDI
IMMIGRATION ANALYST

The daily Southwest border updates are generating nationwide concern, except in Washington, D.C., where indifference reigns.

The latest Department of Homeland Security report showed that in February, more than 100,000 people were either apprehended by or surrendered to federal immigration officials on the U.S.-Mexico border. Those totals, a 14-year high, include about 9,460 unaccompanied minors and more than 19,240 family units, which reflect 62% and 38% increases, respectively, when compared to January's statistics.

Nonetheless, President Joe Biden, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Press Secretary Jen Psaki refuse to even hint that the administration's lax border policies need immediate reining in. For his part, Biden has not spoken officially about what his administration calls a border challenge. But Psaki refused to call the border rush a crisis, instead labeling it "an enormous challenge." Mayorkas, when asked a similar question about whether the border events represented a crisis, answered with a flat out "no."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott didn't hesitate to call the growing border chaos a crisis. Abbott has a better perspective on the border influx than White House operatives, and the governor formed Operation Lone Star to deploy personnel from the Texas Department of Public Safety and the

Texas National Guard to the border to secure the area. Abbott said Operation Lone Star's goal is to "deny Mexican cartels and other smugglers the ability to move drugs and people into Texas."

While the White House border rhetoric has focused almost exclusively on what it describes as the need for a humanitarian response to migration, it's ignored the undeniable connection between open borders and human smuggling. Ohio Sen. Rob Portman is the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs top Republican who has overseen three separate committee investigations that date back over several administrations.

Portman's 2016 investigation, "Protecting Unaccompanied Alien Children from Trafficking and Other Abuses," uncovered that the Department of Health and Human Services failed to adequately vet or to conduct in-depth background checks on the Ohio adults to whom it released minor children. The adults turned out to be human smugglers. The 2018 report, "Oversight of the Care of Unaccompanied Minor Children," came to similarly shocking and dangerous conclusions. HHS and DHS didn't make the recommended post-2016 changes to trafficking crimes and to tracking whether released aliens report for their designated immigration court dates.

Biden appears either under-informed or indifferent to the growing human trafficking trade that his administration encourages. After ending the Remain in Mexico policy, the latest federal government's inducement for more unaccompanied children to rush the border is that

HHS will pay for minors in its custody to be flown to their sponsor or family member's home, often illegal immigrants, when, as is invariably the case, the receiving adult cannot pay. Furthermore, Biden's DHS submitted a notice to the Federal Register to withdraw an existing proposed rule that would require the receiving immigrant to sponsor and care for an arriving migrant once s/he becomes a lawful permanent resident.

While Biden and those close to him debate semantics, last week DHS reached its breaking point, and begged ICE deportation officers to travel to the border ASAP to help with what the agency called "security operations" for the illegal immigrant children and families that have overwhelmed a swamped Border Patrol. Michael Meade, Immigration and Customs Enforcement acting director, pleaded for "immediate action." Volunteers would include civilians with medical or legal experience as well as drivers and food servers.

Officials on the scene won't speculate on when the emergency request for increased border assistance might be called off. The Biden administration is in full denial, and the president refuses to travel to the border to evaluate conditions.

As the surge with its associated criminal and COVID-19 risks intensifies daily, an educated guess is that the existing calamitous circumstances will remain unchanged well into the peak summer months.

Joe Guzzardi is a Progressives for Immigration Reform analyst who has written about immigration for more than 30 years. Contact him at jguzzardi@pfirdc.org.

Letters

Man can't live without nature, but nature can do without man

I agree with George Wuerthner in his comment (National forests, BLM lands should be off-limits to logging, Feb. 16) that forests are restored by natural processes. That's about all, though.

The forest ecosystems started changing dramatically when white man hit the East Coast and haven't stopped changing ever since. He points out a lot of problems that contribute to where we are today, but I don't hear any answers to them.

Sounds as if he is against the Malheur collaborative because logging is part of the possible prob-

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lem-solving ideas. Remember, for the past 30 to 40 years, the environmentalists have guided and directed the U.S. Forest Service in doing its work.

Now we can't see the forest for the trees.
I'm glad to see that there are

some folks trying to work together to find answers for our man-made problems.

We should remember, man can't live without nature, but nature can do without man.

*Ken Koser
Prairie City*

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