

OUR VIEW

A needed state child care change

Every Oregon county was considered a child care desert before the pandemic. Every one. That’s from an Oregon State University analysis. It was true for infants and toddlers. It was true for most counties with preschool students. Just not enough child care slots. This study did not take into account that more than one child can be served by one child care slot, if children are only using them part-time. We also don’t have more recent numbers. And we suppose you could quibble with the definition that a child care desert is a community with more than three children for every regulated child care slot.

But there is no denying it is hard to find affordable, quality child care. It’s a source of anguish and financial worry for working parents. It means trouble for employers. And child care is less accessible to minorities.

Oregon State University-Cascades Campus recognized the problem. It launched its own plan to create more child care slots in the region, supported in part by the Deschutes County Commission, federal money allocated through state Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, and thanks to the continuous advocacy by the Bend Chamber of Commerce.

The Oregon Department of Human Services also recently announced an encouraging change — a reduction in child care costs for working families. A federal rule change permits the state to boost the child care subsidy, or copay, for families in Oregon’s Employment Related Daycare Program.

The average family copay will be about \$16 per month. It will go to zero for families who make 100% or less of the federal poverty level, an annual income of \$21,960 for a family of three. And the upper limit of family copays will be \$130 a month.

Before the pandemic, the average family copay was about \$250. The lowest possible was \$27.

This won’t help every family. It will help some of Oregon’s neediest.

Oregon’s next governor should be one who treats child care with the same intensity of focus as many of the state’s other challenges. You can barely take a breath before there is an announcement about a new state action on climate change. Those efforts should not stop, but could we have some of that intensity turned toward child care change?



Sticking with the facts despite changes

ANDREW CUTLER
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Often I hear about the death of journalism or, at the very least, that the business has changed. I agree with journalism has changed. As far as its death, I think the naysayers are more than a bit premature. No matter what happens going forward in our world, people will always want an independent news source that can give them the clearest roadway to the truth as possible. Anytime, though, there is even controversy over what is the truth, or what is true. In our business we stick to the facts. Facts are the basic building block on the way to finding the underlying truth in any issue. Newspapers — in whatever form

— at their best provide people in a community with an unbiased review of a specific subject. If done correctly, a story will deliver a set of facts that add up to a fundamental truth. It’s not fancy, and really isn’t all that complicated, but it can be difficult. Facts can sometimes be hard to find. Or those facts are shrouded inside a bureaucracy where transparency isn’t the rule. That’s why what our reporters do is often a challenge. Not only do they have a boss who is asking — demanding — for a story to be complete but they must get the facts straight. In a good newsroom, facts and being factual are a big deal. Because when everything is said and done, we must stand on is our reporting and our facts. We can’t fall back on excuses or blame the government if we make a mistake. We must own that mistake — take responsibility — then painstakingly discover how a fact was missed or was reported incorrectly.

We build our entire structure on facts. Sometimes finding those facts is easy. The facts of a car crash, for example, are initially clear. There was a crash. Someone was hurt or not hurt. Yet, when you are wading through reams of public records to find a significant fact, the task can be daunting. Either way, though, our reporters must strive always to find those facts and report them accurately.

We have only our reputations as accurate and fair producers of news to fall back on, and that is why we must always strive to be concise in our reporting. Journalism may have changed over the years, but this cornerstone has not.

Andrew Cutler is the interim editor of The Observer and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing The Observer, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

The River Democracy Act spells trouble

ALICIA ANDRUS
OTHER VIEWS

I’m a retired Forest Service employee with decades of experience writing environmental documents about Wallowa County. I’m uniquely qualified to understand what Sen. Ron Wyden’s River Democracy Act means for our county. When a batch of rivers were designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers in 1988, I helped write river management plans and later formed projects to comply with those plans. I can readily state that Wild and Scenic River designations will further limit logging, fuels reduction, livestock grazing, recreation and public access on public lands, despite the senator’s claim to the contrary. For the private lands that get swept up into Wild and Scenic designation, landowners will see limits on how they manage their own property. This bill will destabilize our already shaky agriculture and farm-based economy, not at first, but incrementally over time in ways that we’ll only recognize in the rearview mirror. The River Democracy Act is promoted as protection for our important water resources. We all love the idea of clean water, but how much protection is enough? Because of our already intact and healthy streams, Wallowa County is home base for many threatened and endangered

ocean-going and resident fish. We have so much habitat, that more and more of it goes unoccupied. Despite ambitious hatchery programs, a dwindling number of ocean-going fish survive their trip to the ocean and back. I outlined many concerns about the bill in a letter to the senator, but my letter was never acknowledged. So I attended the Senate Natural Resource subcommittee video hearing on this proposed bill. The senator described the process used to form this bill as a way for citizens in his faraway state to participate in Washington, D.C., government through the internet. He named it The Oregon Way. I’ve concluded that The Oregon Way is just a means for the laptop class to force legislation on an unsuspecting working class. Here’s how it appears to work. In October 2019, the senator announces an opportunity to nominate streams as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Done without a lot of fanfare, and no one objects to the idea of adding streams to the Wild and Scenic system because they don’t hear about it. He reads a draft bill into the Senate record in February 2021, which is the first alert to rural counties that substantial portions of public and private land are subject to this bill. After the hearing, his staffers go through the motions of talking with those in opposition, but change nothing in the bill. The senator hosts a video conference to supposedly listen to opposing opinions, but only the preapproved are allowed to speak,

most of whom support the bill. Residents often share that they enjoy Wallowa County for its high-quality environmental resources and for its family-friendly communities. Without natural resource-based jobs, our family friendly communities wither. Sen. Wyden’s bill is unraveling the very fabric of Wallowa County that its residents hold dear. For those of you who support this bill because it promises to give us clean, cool water, you might pause and consider whether we already have clean, cool water. You might be advocating for a bill that will incrementally improve water quality at the price of our family-owned farms, tree farms and ranches that are an integral part of our custom and culture. Dissolved family farms are usually taken over by trophy homes, corporate farming or government land acquisition. Is this the future you want for Wallowa County? I thank our county commissioners who see the risks and are informing the senator and his staff that Wallowa County wants none of its streams included in the River Democracy Act. I also question Sen. Wyden’s intentions and want no part of his perverse distortion of representative government that he calls The Oregon Way.

Alicia Andrus was attracted to Wallowa County for the scenery and has stayed 40 years for the people. She’s retired from her Forest Service job as a planner and her private practice as a land surveyor.

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