

OUR VIEW

# We are failing our children

For anyone following the news of the school massacre in Uvalde, Texas, it should be clear that we are failing our children.

For anyone following the news of Oregon's state audit of the Oregon Department of Education titled "State Leaders and Policymakers Must Address Persistent System Risks to Improve K-12 Equity and Student Success," it should be clear that we are failing our children.

For anyone following the news about the nationwide shortage of child care and preschool, it should be clear that we are failing our children.

We are America. We are the most wealthy and powerful country in the world by some measures. Yet, by many other measures, we suck.

Here are a few from the Children's Defense Fund's 2021 report:

**Child poverty:** Nearly 1 in 6 children under age 6 live in households below the poverty line.

**Child hunger:** More than 1 in 7 children live in "food insecure" households.

**Gun violence:** Guns — not motor vehicle accidents — were the leading cause of death in 2018 in children ages 1-19. Nine children die of gun violence every day in this country.

**Bullying:** In 2019, 22% of students age 12-18 reported being bullied during the school year.

**Education:** In 2019, at least 67% of public school eighth graders were not proficient in reading and math. And, only 85% of high school students graduate on time.

**Early childhood care and education:** Our lack of investment in child care and early education means that most families cannot afford (or even find) quality care and education for their infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

All this, despite plenty of research showing that for every \$1 invested in early childhood — birth through kindergarten — the lifelong return on investment is more than 13% a year.

We have neglected our youngest children and their parents for far too long.

Lack of investment in quality early childhood programs has ripple effects. Children who have no exposure to high-quality preschool often struggle in kindergarten. Those children struggle to read by third grade, and struggle to graduate from high school.

Brain development begins at birth, and so much intellectual and socio-emotional development happens in the first five years. Yet we only begin public investment in our children when they turn 5 and enter the K-12 school system. Our tax dollars would go so much further if spent on younger children.

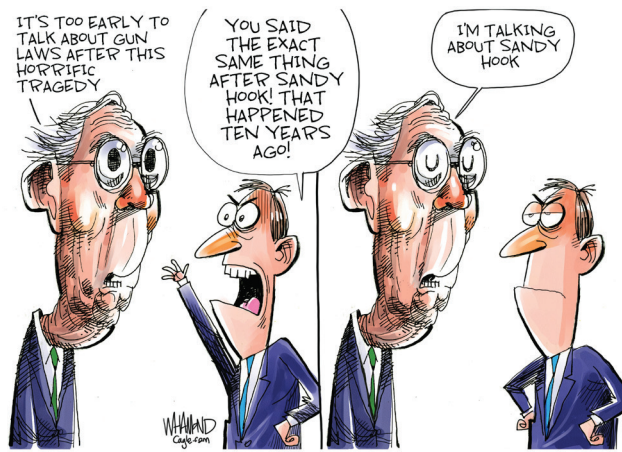
We all need to focus on investments in early child care and preschool.

Universal federally-funded preschool for 3- and 4-year olds would be a great place to start. This does not mean expanding the K-12 school system, although that may work in some areas. It means supporting high-quality, nonprofit child care centers and in-home child care as well.

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# Severe storms happen here, too



**MARC AUSTIN**  
EYE TO THE SKY

Many might think severe weather only strikes the Great Plains and southeastern United States, but make no mistake, severe storms and tornadoes can strike anywhere in the country.

In fact, every state, including Alaska and Hawaii, have recorded at least one tornado. The Inland Northwest is no different, and while we don't see the same frequency of these hazards as locations east of the Rockies, we do get our fair share.

On May 30, 2020, a significant severe thunderstorm event brought several intense thunderstorms to parts of Central and Northeastern Oregon and far Southeastern Washington. Rotating thunderstorms, known as supercells, dropped large hail to the size of golfballs and larger to the west of Bend, and caused extensive wind damage in Culver, where winds were estimated at 80-100 mph.

More recently, on May 6 this year, a storm produced two separate tor-

nadoes between Weston and Tollgate in the Blue Mountains. These tornadoes were given an intensity rating of EF-1, with wind speeds up to 104 mph. The tornadoes caused minor structural damage to a few buildings and wiped out numerous trees.

Umatilla County has historically seen few tornadoes, with only seven documented going back to 1950, including the two on May 6. While these are the only known documented tornadoes, it's likely there have been others that were never witnessed or reported.

Much of National Weather Service Pendleton's county warning area resides in rural areas with sparse populations. The combination of a low frequency of severe weather, and few people to witness and report it, likely means it happens more often than we think.

Digging into the severe weather archives, both Washington and Oregon see an average of two tornadoes per year. These largely occur west of the Cascades, where ingredients for severe weather come together a bit more often — moisture being the key ingredient.

One of the ways to improve our understanding of tornado and severe

thunderstorm frequency is to train people how to safely observe and report severe weather to the NWS. This enables us to get a better grasp of how common large hail, damaging winds and tornadoes really are in the Inland Northwest. The other major benefit of the spotter training program is that it helps NWS forecasters do a better job when it comes to warning the public about hazardous weather.

The combination of complex terrain and limited radar data in some areas make ground-truth observations critical when severe weather is occurring. The best way to become a storm spotter is to sit in on one of our live or virtual spotter training sessions, or take a series of self-guided online training sessions at your convenience.

We're always looking for more storm spotters to engage with us and provide critical weather information. If you're interested, visit [weather.gov/pdt/spottertraining](http://weather.gov/pdt/spottertraining).

■ Marc Austin is a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Austin leads outreach and weather preparedness programs, and engages the media, emergency management and public safety communities in building a weather ready nation.

## CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

### U.S. PRESIDENT

**Joe Biden**  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500  
Comments: 202-456-1111

### U.S. SENATORS

**Ron Wyden**  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-5244  
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

**Jeff Merkley**  
313 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-3753  
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

### U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

**Cliff Bentz**  
2185 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
202-225-6730  
Medford office: 541-776-4646

### GOVERNOR

**Kate Brown**  
160 State Capitol  
900 Court St.  
Salem, OR 97301-4047  
503-378-4582

### STATE REPRESENTATIVES

**Bobby Levy, District 58**  
900 Court St. NE, H-376  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1458  
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

**Greg Smith, District 57**  
900 Court St. NE, H-482  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1457  
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

### STATE SENATOR

**Bill Hansell, District 29**  
900 Court St. NE, S-415  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1729  
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

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Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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