

# KeizerOpinion

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## Homeless solution comes from all

The homeless are fast becoming one of the major challenges for public services across the nation and here in Marion County. There is an array of programs, shelters and campaigns here and throughout the United States to address the issue. Public officials and private sector organizations work to find solutions that so far has proven unsolvable.

Marion County does not have the visual evidence of its homeless that major cities face. In some of America's largest cities one will find block after block filled with tent communities of the homeless. It is disconcerting at the least. The public cries out "Do something!"

People are homeless for different reasons be they economic, mental health issues, problems with illicit drugs, shattering of the family unit or any kind of support system. Understanding that basic truth of the homeless makes the cry to do something less clear. Do what? By whom?

While creating programs, devising shelters and compiling reports, the municipalities and organizations involved need also to come up with suggestions for what Joe Public can do to help. As a generous nation our people always ask "What can I do?" If all that is needed by the organizations addressing the homeless issue is financial support, they need to megaphone that need and lay out how contributions will be used.

Everyone and every industry can have a hand in alleviating the homeless issue. For some it may be a financial donation to a charity that is hosting a shelter or a food kitchen or medical care for those on the street. Those things satisfy the daily needs of people but they don't come close to finding a home for those who want one.

Finding affordable housing has become difficult for those without a constant history of being a renter or those who are un- or underemployed. The strong residential real estate market weighs heavy on apartments and other multi-family housing options. Benefiting from market-led supply and demand, owners of multi-family residences are in the driver's seat when it comes to setting rates. That's called the free market system and should not be disrupted, but there are solutions.

Cities, counties and the state can draft legislation to provide attractive incentives for owners of buildings to convert space into low-income housing. Attractive incentives can include tax breaks as well as waiving and discounting of permitting fees. Any incentives should be good enough to make any property own-

er to seriously consider them. The alternative for a property owner is to let market forces reward them.

Housing for those now homeless should not be free. Those who receive housing need to compensate for it either by paying low monthly rents or with a signed contact to help maintain the residence.

Homelessness is a cruel way to live. How does society aid those who find themselves without a home due to domestic violence, drugs or mental health issues? Rather than look to government to address and solve the problem, society needs to ask itself what they are willing to do, if anything, to help those who need a hand up rather than a hand out. Regardless of what solution one considers there is money required. Some in the private sector may question why their tax dollars are going for those who decide to live outdoors. That is a simplistic question; given a choice, wouldn't everyone rather have a home to live in?

Most people would agree that a government's primary role is to protect its people and keep them safe. Protecting people against the ravages of homelessness is no less important than maintaining the defense of the nation from outsiders. Government can't help those who don't want help but it can certainly be in the corner of those who seek a hand up.

These are vulnerable people living in our parks and on our sidewalks. Unless we, the people, collectively decide to privatize the homeless, we must rely on our public officials to do the right thing and allocate enough money for those most in need. As a people we don't have the training to counsel someone with mental health issues, that has to come from the experts. The same goes for those people fighting addiction and who are homeless. There is a certain skill set that the average person does not have and we turn to the professionals.

What we, as a society have, is empathy. Understanding, acceptance, respect and amity offered by us will go a long way to let those who are homeless through no fault of their own know they are not alone. The homeless are not invisible and we shouldn't treat them as such.

With an economy that is booming there certainly are jobs available to those unemployed homeless. We have to have the will to help address the problem so it is no longer a black mark on society. Ask society to lend a hand for its own benefit as well as the homeless and society will answer affirmatively.

—LAZ

our opinion



## 'Bad' jobs don't have to be that way

By E.J. DIONNE JR.

So many policy proposals aimed at reducing economic inequality emphasize moving disadvantaged people into higher-paying, higher-skilled jobs, typically with more access to education and training.

We do need to invest far more in expanding opportunity for fellow citizens who have lost all hope for advancement, but there is a flaw in this thinking, as Steven Dawson argues in *Make Bad Jobs Better*, a compendium of his recent work published earlier this year by the Pinkerton Foundation. If we define success "solely as securing a middle-class job," he writes, "then we will limit ourselves to helping only a narrow segment of low-income workers improve their lives."

Dawson focuses on the tens of millions of Americans who do very necessary work in our society and receive little reward for their efforts. He challenges the idea that "bad jobs" are destined to be bad forever, and that little can be done to enhance them.

Consider that we mourn the decline of auto, steel and other manufacturing jobs that were seen in the past as at least "bad" as the retail and service occupations of the new American working class. It took unions working to raise pay and benefits and social legislation limiting hours and protecting worker safety to make old economy blue-collar jobs "good."

The lesson is that what constitutes good work is a matter of social and political decision-making—and choices by employers to see their workers as assets and not merely as costs.

Dawson is a pioneer in doing what he recommends. At the Paraprofes-

sional Healthcare Institute, he helped create employee-owned cooperatives of home health care workers, thereby converting what were once poorly paid jobs into pathways to independence, entrepreneurship and respect.

Dawson is scathing about the way our employment markets treat large numbers of very hard-working people. "A bad job is not simply the absence of a good job," he writes. "A bad job destabilizes the individual, her family and the community. A bad job not only fails to pay enough for decent food and shelter for a worker's family, it can risk her health, disrupt any chance for a predictable family life, undermine her dignity, and deny her voice within the workplace."

He notes that "the occupations that employ the largest numbers of low-income youth and adult workers ... experienced higher than average real wage declines" in the years after the Great Recession. The pay drops were especially large for workers in retail, personal care and food preparation.

For many who find themselves at the bottom of the economy, the bane of their lives is instability: wage theft, part-time work, seasonal work, variable hours, and unpredictable schedules—the problem of "not knowing when you will be called to show up to your next part-time shift." Low-wage jobs are also among the least safe.

Public policy has a role to play in making jobs better, starting with higher minimum wages, income supplements such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, universal family leave and health coverage for everyone. We should be building on the Affordable

Care Act, not gutting it.

And many low-income jobs are supported indirectly by government money (Medicaid especially), so public programs should be consciously geared not just to providing essential services but also to offering platforms for the improvement of work life itself, for enriched training, and for more worker voice. These can, in turn, raise the standard of the services.

Dawson looks as well to private-sector employers as part of the solution. Especially when labor markets are tight, employers have an interest in satisfied, engaged and well-trained workers who welcome responsibility. This is one reason why the Federal Reserve should be wary of steps that would increase unemployment.

In another useful paper, "Restore the Promise of Work," Dawson joins the Aspen Institute's Maureen Conway to call for lifting up "high-road employers" who "offer concrete examples of how good jobs can be beneficial to all." Tax policy can encourage high-road practices, and Conway and Dawson note that when governments contract for private-sector services, job quality should be part of the negotiations.

We should not allow the melodramas of the Trump presidency to overshadow the problems we need to solve or distract us from the reforms and innovations that could change the lives of a great many struggling people.

Dawson writes that "fear and insecurity will remain, and deepen, unless having a job once again means securing stability, dignity and self-worth for ourselves and our families." When it comes to job quality, we need to get to work.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

the opinion of others

## Buehler's not an education candidate

Knute Buehler is the Republican candidate for governor of Oregon. He has announced as his highest priority to lead Oregon schools from the nation's bottom five to the top five in five years. Oregon governors serve four-year terms. So why is he not committed to four years?

Buehler has spoken and written on his subject of highest interest because, he says, "Oregon politicians have failed to do what is necessary to improve the quality and funding of our K-12 public schools." While he further writes that "good things" are happening in our schools every day, "too many schools have been left out and behind." For just one of the many problems is the number who fail to graduate. He must not be aware of the huge disparities between districts throughout the state and their divergent delivery abilities.

Buehler has served two terms in the Oregon House of Representatives. Why during his two terms did we not hear anything from him about his interest to reform Oregon education K-12? Since he's an orthopedic surgeon who was trained, as most of them are, in part at least, by tax-supported institutions, then why is he not, in his mid-50s, serving the medical needs of the Central Oregon area in which he chose to reside? Since he says his goal as a state leader is education reform, why did he spin his wheels trying to secure the Secretary of State job? After all, its focused on audits and elections?

Oregon has proven time and

again that the voting citizens in this state are, with some exceptions in wealthy school districts, only able and willing to financially support at the very minimal level or willing to support public education at all. Buehler says he can increase the general fund budget for public schools an average of 15 percent per year or a whopping 75 percent during his plan. He says he'll get the \$1.2 billion he needs by taking it from public pensions and that health insurance that supports Oregon's poorest citizens. As his GOP colleagues in the Oregon House and Senate are so fond of chortling: "That'll happen when pigs fly!"

He says he will see to it that the money he can take away from retired public employees and cutbacks and costs associated with health insurance will bring into existence performance-based classrooms. Hope he will soon explain the specifics of what he knows about performance-based classrooms and how successfully or not this re-staging of schools will deal with this reform, its pitfalls and challenges.

Buehler throws around such concepts as "critical, evidence-based proficiency standards" as though all a governor must do is announce his intentions in tradition-bound schools and they'll transform like magic into a new order of things. This candidate's interests sound so very similar to a man who got to be governor, John Kitzhaber, another medical doctor who sounded serious in his desire to reform Oregon education and then walked away

from it by hiring a big name from the East to lead his plan for reform.

Buehler references the 180-day school year in Washington state as a model for Oregon's 165-day year to emulate. What is known is that for years Washington citizens have been more interested in public education at all levels by investing in and modernizing its public schools and universities. Oregon's residents do not send its representatives to Salem with a plan to fund education at any level. To the contrary, the representatives arrive at Oregon's capitol, especially from GOP-dominate areas, with the order to cut, cut, cut everywhere and public education kindergarten through graduate school has suffered accordingly.

This writer is not impressed by Governor Kate Brown's interests or efforts to improve public education. However, knowing what's known about Knute Buehler does not reassure that he is going to turn any corner in public education. He and his wife are among Oregon's wealthiest residents who, with their million dollar incomes from professional services, are also involved in 14 other business activities all of which are in business to make money not perform charitable, volunteer, or public services. They appear to be people who solely seek wealth accumulation and the related power to wield it.

(Gene H. McIntyre shares his opinion weekly in the *Keizertimes*.)

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