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OUR VIEW

Rural communities should ensure contraceptive care

The good news: Teen pregnancies are down throughout the U.S. and Oregon. The not-so-good news: Rural areas like ours account for a disproportionate share of them due to less access to reproductive-planning services.

Babies are good and never to be regretted. But as eloquently noted by Alexa Knutsen, a 30-year-old new mom and lead teacher at the alternative education program at Gray School in Astoria, “You know that when you look at your child, you’re like, this is life-changing and I don’t regret this. But, ‘Man this was hard, and I don’t know if I was ready for that at that moment.’ And I’ve had my students say as much.”

A baby and the pregnancy leading up to one are among the most profound changes in the life of a woman, hopefully one in which the prospective father and other family members are fully and supportively engaged. It’s impossible to overstate what an impact a baby has on a parent’s emotions, time and finances. The challenges can be far magnified if the mother is a teenager, with schooling and other prerequisites of adulthood still unfinished.

In Clatsop County, the Oregon Health Authority estimates the teen birth rate at 30 per 1,000 women 15 to 19, higher than the statewide rate of 25.1 and considerably more than in some nearby more-urban counties. The rate in Washington County, for example, is 19.5. The nationwide rate was 22.3 in 2015, down from 41.5 in 2007.

More effective use of contraceptives and higher-quality sex education are credited for the decline.

Clatsop County has only one family planning clinic — at the county building in Astoria. Elsewhere in the county, lack of convenient contraceptive care is a serious issue. On a positive note, local high schools appear to recognize the issue, and are taking or planning steps to help address the need to deliver better information to teens.

In a time of increasing scarcity of public funds, potential cuts in the Affordable Care Act and congressional attacks on Planned Parenthood, it’s vital for all rural communities to act in the best interests of young people by ensuring the availability of contraceptive education and care.

All the care in the world is no substitute for responsible behavior. But we owe it to our kids and communities to make sure babies and teens get the best possible start in life.

Class-size bill isn’t a cure for the problem

A bill that’s been introduced in the Oregon Legislature that originated with the chairwoman of the House Education Committee seeks to make class size a mandatory part of collective bargaining with teachers.

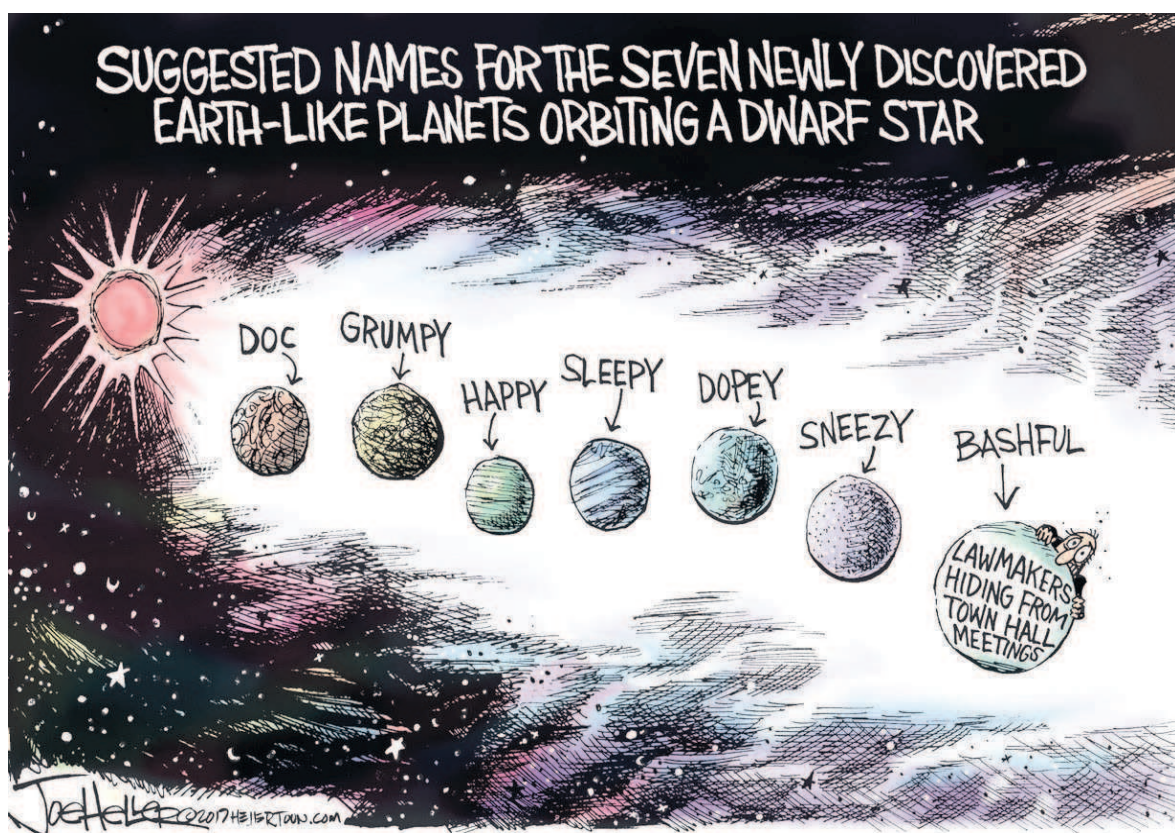
While every Oregonian should be concerned about our children and the relationship of class size to quality education, we think it’s a bad idea because class size is a symptom of a much larger problem which this bill doesn’t address. The full Education Committee should dismiss it when it comes to a vote.

The bill was proposed by Rep. Margaret Doherty, D-Tigard, who is a former contract negotiator for the Oregon Education Association, which represents teachers. Class sizes are not currently negotiated as part of working conditions covered by collective bargaining.

Doherty’s bill comes at a time when the state is generating record revenue but yet still faces a \$1.8 billion shortfall because of legacy costs like the Public Employees Retirement System and Medicaid cutbacks. The full Legislature is struggling to provide even close to adequate, sustainable funding for existing faculty sizes, which would need to increase to lower class sizes. As Chuck Bennett of the Confederation of School Administrators said during a committee hearing last week, “There is no debate on class size; smaller classes are better for kids. . . . The problem is the funding is just not there for the level of personnel we believe would be required.”

Bennett also told the committee the requirement would give teachers’ unions another bargaining chip without giving school officials’ resources to meet their demands. “You’ve got a bucket of demands; I’ve got a bucket of nothing,” Bennett said.

While we will always argue for lower class sizes, better teaching conditions and higher quality education, Bennett is right. Legislators should avoid bills like this that can create mandates and don’t do anything to address the real causes that determine class size. They instead should focus their efforts on finding a cure for the overall problem rather than simply trying to treat a symptom.



Trump and the ‘Madman Theory’



AP Photo/Alex Brandon

President Donald Trump speaks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Friday in Maryland.

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — At the heart of Donald Trump’s foreign policy team lies a glaring contradiction. On the one



hand, it is composed of men of experience, judgment and traditionalism. Meaning, they are all very much within the parameters of mainstream American internationalism as practiced since 1945. Practically every member of the team — the heads of State, Homeland Security, the CIA, and most especially Defense Secretary James Mattis and national security adviser H.R. McMaster — could fit in a Cabinet put together by, say, Hillary Clinton.

The commander in chief, on the other hand, is quite the opposite — inexperienced, untraditional, unbounded. His pronouncements on everything from the “one China” policy to the two-state (Arab-Israeli) solution, from NATO obsolescence to the ravages of free trade, continue to confound and, as we say today, disrupt.

The obvious question is: Can this arrangement possibly work? The answer thus far, surprisingly, is: perhaps.

The sample size is tiny but take, for example, the German excursion. Trump dispatched his grown-ups — Vice President Pence, Defense Secretary Mattis, Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson — to various international confabs in Germany to reassure allies with the usual pieties about America’s commitment to European security. They did drop a few hints to Trump’s loud complaints about allied parasitism, in particular shirking their share of the defense burden.

Within days, Germany

announced a 20,000-man expansion of its military. Smaller European countries are likely to take note of the new setup. It’s classic good-cop, bad-cop: The secretaries represent foreign policy continuity but their boss preaches America First. Message: Shape up.

John Hannah of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies suggests that the push-pull effect might work on foes as well as friends. Last Saturday, China announced a cut-off of all coal imports from North Korea for the rest of 2017. Constituting more than one-third of all North Korean exports, this is a major blow to its economy.

Alas, there is also a worst-case scenario. It needs no elaboration.

True, part of the reason could be Chinese ire at the brazen assassination of Kim Jong Un’s half-brother, who had been under Chinese protection. Nonetheless, the boycott was declared just days after a provocative North Korean missile launch — and shortly into the term of a new American president who has shown that he can be erratic and quite disdainful of Chinese sensibilities.

His wavering on the “one China” policy took Beijing by surprise. Trump also strongly denounced Chinese expansion in the South China Sea and conducted an ostentatious love-in with Japan’s prime minister, something guaranteed to rankle the Chinese. Beijing’s boycott of Pyongyang is many things, among them a nod to Washington. This suggests that the peculiar

and discordant makeup of the U.S. national security team — traditionalist lieutenants, disruptive boss — might reproduce the old Nixonian “Madman Theory.” That’s when adversaries tread carefully because they suspect the U.S. president of being unpredictable, occasionally reckless and potentially crazy dangerous. Henry Kissinger, with Nixon’s collaboration, tried more than once to exploit this perception to pressure adversaries.

Trump’s people have already shown a delicate touch in dealing with his bouts of loopiness. Trump has gone on for years about how we should have taken Iraq’s oil for ourselves. Sunday in Baghdad, Mattis wryly backed off, telling his hosts that “All of us in America have generally paid for our gas and oil all along, and I am sure we will continue to do so in the future.”

Yet sometimes an off-center comment can have its uses. Take Trump’s casual dismissal of a U.S. commitment to a two-state solution in the Middle East. The next day, U.S. policy was brought back in line by his own U.N. ambassador. But this diversion might prove salutary. It’s a message to the Palestinians that their decades of rejectionism may not continue to pay off with an inexorable march toward statehood — that there may actually be a price to pay for making no concessions and simply waiting for the U.S. to deliver them a Palestinian state.

To be sure, a two-track, two-policy, two-reality foreign policy is risky, unsettling and has the potential to go totally off the rails. This is not how you would draw it up in advance. It’s unstable and confusing. But the experience of the first month suggests that, with prudence and luck, it can yield the occasional benefit — that the combination of radical rhetoric and conventional policy may induce better behavior both in friend and foe.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Street parking

Enough about politics, for now. On my frequent walks around my neighborhood, I have noticed that on various streets in the area there are cars parked on both sides of the roadway.

These avenues were laid out in the 1940s, for the most part, and are barely wide enough for today’s automobiles to negotiate them when vehicles line both sides. School buses and other support vehicles such as garbage trucks are, in some cases, unable to travel down these

streets, yet only one of the five or six residential avenues in the area in which I live are posted to indicate parking on only one side of the street.

I was under the impression (obviously wrongly) that a builder was required to establish off-street parking as part of the requirement to build a house in the city. In many cases, homeowners have turned their garages into studies or libraries as I have, however, the driveways still exists, and yet some residents refuse to use that off-street space to

park, choosing instead to park their vehicles on the street, thus impeding traffic flow.

Perhaps it is high time for the city of Astoria to take a hard look at these streets, and designate many more of them “parking one side only,” if for no other reason, for possible accessibility of emergency vehicles, such as ambulances and fire trucks.

That is what I think; I could be wrong.

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