

# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# More foster families, child caseworkers needed

Oregon's foster-care system needs to enter the 21st century.

A scathing audit conducted by the Secretary of State's Office makes that clear. Caseworkers are overworked and exhausted, foster families are in short supply, and children suffer.

The state Audits Division began the audit a year ago. The results, though disturbing, should not come as a surprise. Oregon's leaders have long known of the problems, and a series of administrators have promised improvement.

That turnaround finally might be underway. In releasing the audit report, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson criticized the culture and performance of the Oregon Department of Human Services, but he praised its new leadership.

The top administration has been doing such simple but important things as visiting DHS field offices throughout the state, talking firsthand with front-line workers. DHS Director Fariborz Pakseresht, who took over in September, and his top managers regularly hold town hall meetings to update and listen to employees, advocates and the public.

The most critical concern is to recruit, train and retain far more caseworkers and foster families. Richardson said the state needs nearly 800 additional caseworkers and related staff.



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

A foster parent holds a child in 2007 in Portland.

Foster parents deserve higher compensation to cover their costs. And the state's supposedly state-of-the-art foster care computer system, like other IT projects, is a frustrating mess.

Here on the North Coast, there is a perennial shortage of foster care families. In recent years, The Daily Astorian has reported "it is increasingly difficult to find a foster home in Clatsop County,

keep the children in their school district and prevent siblings from getting separated. In some cases, the local Child Welfare District office has had to place foster children in neighboring counties."

Meanwhile, Texas has a real-time system for tracking available placements for foster children, whereas Oregon too often houses children in hotels while caseworkers send emails

desperately seeking an available family.

Oregon state Rep. Knute Buehler, the Bend Republican who is running for governor, responded to the audit by calling for a special bipartisan commission to recommend specific reforms that could be implemented within 90 days.

That is a good idea, even though Pakseresht has accepted the audit report's recommendations and vowed to follow through. But during the 35-day legislative session that begins Monday, Oregon lawmakers need not wait — they dare not wait — to add caseworkers and help foster children.

This audit report belongs on every legislator's desk, not on the shelf.

If you think you might be willing to help fill the gap in foster care, call 800-331-0503. A foster care specialist will answer initial questions and provide a contact name of a Department of Human Services worker.

The foster parent is given a stipend and must provide food, shelter, clothing, a sleeping area and other basic necessities. He or she serves as the primary contact for the child's school, makes day care arrangements and schedules extracurricular activities, and drives them to their medical, counseling and court appointments.

It is a brilliant opportunity to help children in need of compassion and care.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Blame game continues to divide us

As long as we, as one nation, continue to play the blame game and point fingers, we will continue to be divided.

I am reminded of the scripture when the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land." — 2 Chronicles 7:14

Only then.  
This is my hope.

KATHY OLSON  
Astoria

### National parks need money to stay safe and accessible

We were pleased to see that Clatsop County, Astoria, and Warrenton all have publicly supported our National Park Service (NPS), and have encouraged Congress to find a permanent source of funding to address the deferred maintenance backlog that poses a threat to the future of these amazing places.

We are fortunate to have a draw like Fort Clatsop in our region. In 2016, nearly 300,000 visitors came to Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. Those folks shopped in our stores, ate in our restaurants and slept in our lodgings.

All told, they spent over \$16.5 million in our communities, which in turn supported 260 local jobs. The park is more than just an important part of our history; it is a vital economic engine for Clatsop County, and one that we have a shared interest in maintaining.

Overall, national parks have seen an increase in visitation in recent years. At the same time, their infrastructure continues to age and there is inadequate funding for NPS to keep up with necessary maintenance. If our national parks are going to continue to serve as economic drivers for local communities, we need to give them the funds they need to stay safe and accessible.

We join our local governments in a call to action on the issue of deferred maintenance in our national parks. We are proud that Rep. Suzanne Bonamici has co-sponsored a bill to tackle this issue, and we hope the rest of the Oregon delegation will do the same.

SKIP HAUKE  
Executive Director, Astoria-Warrenton  
Area Chamber of Commerce

### Eliminate the IRS, go to national sales tax

For years The Wall Street Journal sent a hypothetical taxpayer circumstance to 10 different CPA firms. Year after year, they would receive back 10 different tax liabilities.

Taxpayers' unease with the IRS continues to grow, as once again the agency is shown to create its own laws, priorities, and rules.



## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters in poor taste will not be printed.

Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at dailyastorian.com/submit\_letters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or 1555 North Roosevelt in Seaside, or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.

("The IRS Evades Accountability and Its Excuse is Ridiculous," The Wall Street Journal, Jan. 10).

Compounding the worry is the five years it took to prove the IRS guilty of slow-walking Tea Party/patriot groups on applications for exempt status in the run-up to the 2012 election. The \$3.5 million fine paid out of taxpayer funds was another slap in the face of attentive Americans.

Add that former IRS chief Lois Lerner who, after successfully covering up agency wrongdoing before Congress for two years, was allowed to retire with full benefits, and you're leading taxpayers to conclude the IRS rules the Congress, not the other way around.

The only way to de-weaponize the IRS, which obviously intimidates lawmakers, is to go to a national sales tax. This would simplify rules, stop the threat of nefarious audits and end the IRS as a tool against enemies of the

bureaucratic state. In addition, it would take the governor off the engines of personal motivation in each of us.

The uniquely American ideal regarding the "pursuit of happiness" never included the muscular arm of your authoritative government tattooed with the letters "IRS."

WAYNE MAYO  
Scappoose

### Congress doesn't understand Amtrak issues

The otherwise well-written Daily Astorian Dec. 26 editorial regarding Amtrak's Dec. 18 derailment erred regarding why Eastern Oregon Amtrak service ceased in 1997 ("Railroad companies have dragged their feet on safety improvements").

That service was eliminated by a vote of

U.S. Congress members, a majority of whom appear unencumbered by comprehension of the issues involved:

1. No national intercity rail passenger service systems earn a profit.

2. Amtrak exists because most U.S. private railroads could not earn a profit from passenger service.

3. Amtrak's cost accounting does not identify the actual cost of individual trains or routes, nor are such costs calculated in the same way for trains operated on the Boston-Washington Northeast Corridor (NEC, where Amtrak owns the tracks) as for trains Amtrak operates elsewhere, such as Eastern Oregon.

4. Eliminating one or more train routes has invariably reduced system operating revenues more than system operating costs.

5. Increasing frequency of service invariably increases ridership and direct operating revenues faster than direct operating costs rise.

6. Amtrak recovers 94 percent of its system-wide direct operating costs from its direct operating revenues, but its capital investment funding perpetually fails to meet its capital investments needs, such as: rebuilding the NEC to permit recently ordered new high speed trains to operate at their 176 mph design speed; expanding the non-NEC fleet to operate at least two daily round trips on each route; resuming operation of many previously discontinued trains; and adding new routes crossing existing routes to vastly expand the number of city-pairs served by our nation's national rail passenger train service.

HOWARD HARDING  
Akron, Ohio