

OPINION

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Punishing children is one step too far

I spend a lot of my time thinking about foster kids and their welfare. In my legal career I've represented hundreds of kids who have been removed from their parents because of neglect and/or abuse. Some of these kids make it home, some do not. Whichever outcome awaits them, they are indelibly changed.

I read a lot of scholarly articles on the trauma associated with removal of a child from a parent. I spend time talking to children about what has happened to them. I read hundreds of psychological evaluations of children and their parents. I read state, federal and case law.

I spend a lot of time mired in the dilemma of how best to serve children who are first traumatized in their home of origin and then further traumatized by being taken from the only family they know. Remember that

these are children whose parents have been given due process, who have been proven to be unfit, and whose children are placed in, for the most part, state-certified foster homes.

(A caveat here, this is not a discussion of the merits, or lack thereof, of state foster homes. I will say that here in Clatsop County we enjoy the privilege of having good foster families).

I am so troubled by the recent news regarding the implementation of policies at our border in which children are removed from their parents and placed, according to Sen. Jeff Merkley's eyewitness account, in cages within detention centers.

The justification for this cruel move has been that it is a means by which to discourage parents from entering the country illegally. I have listened to the hyperbole of government officials who justify the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement by telling us that really this is no different than what happens whenever anyone is prosecuted for a crime. In short, you commit a crime, you get locked up, and your children are taken from you.



U.S. Customs and Border Protection

People sit in cages at an immigration detention facility in McAllen, Texas.

'Is this really what we want this country to be? It's not what I want this country to be.'

I have read social media comments and posts from people who appear to have bought into this reasoning hook, line and sinker. It breaks my heart, and I find myself vacillating between tears of anger and tears of grief.

I would like to point out some of the major fallacies behind this thinking:

1. The majority of people entering the country illegally are not engaging in a criminal act. There are only specific instances under which they could be prosecuted for a crime, and most will not meet the criteria to fall within the scope of that statute.

2. We do not remove children from people simply because they have committed, or even been convicted of a crime. To say that we do is nonsense. State intervention

is limited, for the most part, to instances of abuse and neglect. Simply committing a crime does not meet this criteria.

3. Where it is deemed necessary for the state to intervene, they must comply with rules and laws which ensure that not only the children's rights are protected, but also the parents' rights are protected. It does not appear that any attempt is being made to ensure that the parties in these matters have been given due process.

4. Federal law requires that when a child is taken into care they must be placed in the least restrictive, most family like setting that will ensure the health and safety of the child. Federal law gives preference to relative over stranger foster care. If states do not comply with this law then they lose the

federal funding needed to pay for services. This is a law that the federal government mandates. Obviously, the federal government is not complying with this requirement — but then, they forgot to pass a law requiring the humane treatment of children who come into federal custody.

5. The law that applies to states also specifically prohibits using children as pawns to obtain parental compliance. Specifically, contact between a child and parent cannot be restricted as a means to punish the parent into compliance. This is because the effect of removing children and isolating them is a traumatic event that will likely result in "punishment" of the child.

I ask that each of you think about how it must feel to be a child, who after being packed up by a parent, and taken on a grueling journey, is confronted by armed men in uniform who don't speak your language, and who simply take you away to be stored in a warehouse, in a pen. Imagine that you come from a country where armed men in uniform take people away, and that your experience is that those people never return — they are disappeared.

Imagine that you are housed with strangers who are also scared and afraid, who can offer you little comfort, because they have no comfort to give. Imagine that all the adults who come to see you speak another language, and can't or won't explain to you what is happening. You are simply left to wonder what is to become of you.

Is this really what we want this country to be?

It's not what I want this country to be. If you want to see this stopped, review the bills that are starting to be introduced. Reach out to those representatives in Congress fighting to put the brakes on. Encourage your friends, families and enemies to speak up. Write, call, take out ads, rent billboards, do whatever you think is best, because no matter what their parents have done, punishing children is simply one step too far.

Mary Ann Murk is an Astoria attorney who practices juvenile and criminal law.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Homeless column should have been on front page

The Thursday, June 14 lead story in The Daily Astorian was "Customers line up for new Walmart in Warrenton." The second lead story was "Astoria tackles final leg of riverfront plan," which, in reality, was the most important story until page 4A, the guest column by Bill Van Nostran, pastor of First Presbyterian Church. "Don't continue to deny homeless problem" was front-page worthy.

I'm not a Presbyterian, and I've never heard Bill Van Nostran speak, but what he had to say, and the concise way he laid out the problem, was an astute observation. We, and every other community in the U.S. are trying to avoid spending money to combat a problem that is spreading like a wildfire out of control.

I know we have a task force discussing the issue, but maybe what we need is a great big billboard in the middle of town that keeps a tally ... "Five more people in Astoria became homeless today."

The quote at the end of the column by J.R.R. Tolkien was spot on.

Please don't throw away Thursday's newspaper until you read and save page 4A, because it needs to be read over and over.

LARRY ALLEN
Astoria

Cannon Beach chamber should listen to community

This letter addresses the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce's recent marketing piece, "Directions." The publication was delivered to all Cannon Beach mailbox holders, and immediately started a dialogue among residents.

"Directions" let us know that our Cannon Beach voices were either not heard, or ignored, when there was public outcry to the chamber's narrow focus expressed in January's Cannon Beach Gazette article on who should be targeted to walk our beaches, and enjoy our amenities, with the chamber's decision to target "affluent millennials" ("New Cannon Beach logo and tagline designed to be 'fresh' and 'contemporary,'" Jan. 9).

Now, in "Directions," under "Target Markets," the chamber continues their methodology to discriminate for particular segments of their geographic market focus. "The 'L-BGT ...' and 'small group luxury travel' are highlighted in the piece, and seemed to tag on to January's 'affluent millennials.'"

Once again the chamber needs to remember that Cannon Beach is not a place for affluent millennials, LGBT groups, or small group luxury travel visitors. Cannon Beach, exceptional by so many measures, is not for

just the commercial, a certain age, sexual orientation group, or a selective group of the wealthy.

It is place for every one of us who want to take a breath of the sea air and watch the surf. A place to be protected for future generations, not the quick market, but sustainable amenities that compliment the gift of this place.

We are not Seattle or Portland. We are Cannon Beach. Please chamber, listen to your community.

LOLLY CHAMPION
Cannon Beach

Pesticides are killing our bees

My wife and I had been bee keepers for decades, and we are concerned that the use of insecticides that contain neonicotinoids have led to the collapse of bee colonies, as documented in Germany. This was evident to us when we lost all our hives last year. They were all young, healthy and thriving, and then nearly overnight they all died.

We now attribute this to the use of these pesticides. The bees collect the pollen from plants that have taken in the poison through their leaves or roots, take it back to the hive, feed the queen who then dies, and so does any other bee or larva that has been feed the affected pollen. When there is no queen the hive will not survive.

Please do not buy or use any product that contains any of the following neonicotinoids ingredients: imidacloprid, clothianidin, acetamiprid, thiacloprid, thiamethoxam. Also any that have fipronil or any of the synthetic pyrethroids.

It's sad, but so far this year I have seen only one bee in our yard.

RICK POWERS
Astoria

We need foster parents in Clatsop County

While driving through Astoria recently, it was encouraging to see concerned citizens protest the unconscionable treatment of children who are detained at our country's borders. Our values as caring community members do not allow us to turn a blind eye to such treatment: innocent children are traumatized, warehoused, and considered collateral damage. Outrage is the only appropriate response, and I do not want to discourage anyone from being outraged.

Yet there is more to be done. We have 100 children in the child welfare system in Clatsop County today who are traumatized and need us to be there for them, collectively and with open hearts. It is not enough to point fingers and proclaim that "the system" is fail-



ing those children. Unless we step up as a community, we are failing them.

They need volunteer drivers to take them to appointments; caretakers to help out during the summer days when school is out; respite providers; Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA); and someone to take them in — we need foster parents for children of all ages in Clatsop County.

Please continue to be outraged at the cruel treatment of children all over the world — and please consider what you can do right here in our community to make a real difference. You can reach the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Welfare office at 503-325-9179 to learn about fostering youth; Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc. (GOBHI) for therapeutic foster care information at (503) 850-9211; or CASA at clatsopcasa.org to learn about becoming an advocate.

JULIA MABRY
Executive Director, Clatsop CASA
Astoria

'Evangelicals' don't all support Trump

I certainly hope that when the news reports that "evangelical" Christians strongly support President Donald Trump that readers don't conclude that refers to all Christians, of which I am one. The word evangelical comes from the New Testament and means "good news" as defined and shaped by the person, teachings and actions of Jesus.

In his lying, his praise of brutal dictators, his disparagement of women and minorities, his lack of empathy and sympathy, his announcing that he has never asked God for forgiveness, etc., I don't see anything evan-

gelical in the approach of Trump. In fact, some conservative evangelicals don't see it either, and are making a break.

Peter Wehner, a fellow at the conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center, has said he can no longer use the words Republican or evangelical to define himself, for both words are too closely associated with the support of Trump.

I trust this will not be permanent. "Evangelical" is at the heart of the Christian faith, and cannot be reduced to a narrow political usage. And, Wehner writes that he senses "winds of change are blowing through ... the broader evangelical world" (bit.ly/21UcQw).

For example, he reports that the Southern Baptist Convention, historically conservative and evangelical, is loosening the tether to the Republican party and to Donald Trump. I hope those winds will become a gale, for the sake of our country, as well as the recovery of that very important word, "evangelical."

JOHN WECKER
Retired pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Astoria

Stop warehousing children

The current practice of separating thousands of immigrant children from their parents is evil; they will be psychologically scarred for life. It reminds me of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Now the president is trying to blame the Democrats for this "law," while he and his attorney general have publicly supported the zero-tolerance rule. We the people should not let this stand.

CAROLYN EADY
Astoria