

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

## We can't keep failing the most vulnerable

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. 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.

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,



A foster parent hold a child in this Oct. 2007 file photo.

AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

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.

## OTHER VIEWS

## Woody Allen meets #MeToo

Four years ago, when Woody Allen was given a lifetime achievement award by the Golden Globes, Dylan Farrow curled up in a ball on her bed, crying hysterically. Then she wrote an open letter for my blog (nobody else seemed to want to publish it) describing how, when she was 7 years old, Allen allegedly sexually assaulted her.

"That he got away with what he did to me haunted me as I grew up," she wrote. "I was terrified of being touched by men. I developed an eating disorder. I began cutting myself. That torment was made worse by Hollywood."

We now know that Hollywood was hiding many such secrets, and was quite uninterested in accountability for powerful bullies. After she bared her soul, Dylan was met with much "vitriol and disbelief," as she put it.

"There were days when I thought, 'I've made a terrible mistake, I should never have opened my mouth,'" Dylan told me the other day.

But in the last few months, the #MeToo movement has changed that. "I am so sorry, Dylan," Mira Sorvino wrote. Ellen Page declared, "I did a Woody Allen movie and it is the biggest regret of my career." Actors are donating earnings from Woody Allen movies to sexual assault organizations, and Amazon is said to be considering canceling its distribution of his movies.

All this has been "incredibly healing," Dylan said.

Frank Maco, the Connecticut prosecutor who oversaw the case in the 1990s, told me that he watched Dylan recently on "CBS This Morning" and was impressed by how the little girl had grown up to be "strong and determined." He reiterated what he had said at the time: that he had probable cause to bring a criminal case against Allen (who was Dylan's adoptive father) but couldn't justify putting a fragile child through a brutal trial.

Maco added that both Dylan and her mother, Mia Farrow, had appeared to be honorable and truthful. "Mia Farrow acted as nothing more than a concerned mother," he said. "There was no indication that this was a fabricated story."

I'm a friend of Dylan and her family, so I'm not an unbiased observer. But over the years, I have reviewed the evidence, and on balance it persuades me. The most important contrary point is that an evaluation team from Yale New Haven Hospital concluded that Allen had not sexually abused Dylan, but it was sharply criticized by other experts. Meanwhile, the New York judge in the Mia Farrow-Woody Allen child custody case ruled that although he couldn't be sure whether the sexual assault itself had occurred, "Mr. Allen's behavior toward Dylan was grossly inappropriate."

That judge, Elliott Wilk, noted that on the day of the alleged assault, a baby sitter saw Allen with his head on Dylan's lap, facing her body. A tutor soon afterward found that Dylan wasn't wearing her underwear. And



NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
Comment

nobody has explained where Dylan and Allen went when they both disappeared as the baby sitter was searching for them — except Dylan, who says that that's when the assault happened.

Meanwhile, it turns out that Allen's private notes over the decades are "filled with misogynist and lecherous musings," showing "an insistent, vivid obsession with young women and girls," according to Richard Morgan, who sifted through

Allen's 56-box archive and recounted his findings in *The Washington Post*.

There is always a risk that meticulous scrutiny of a long career leads to cherry-picking and finding whatever we're looking for, especially for somebody trying to be creative and funny. I reached out to Allen through his publicist but did not receive a response. He has consistently denied the allegations of abuse, and in October he warned against allowing "a witch hunt atmosphere, a Salem atmosphere."

Indeed, the certainty of the Dylan Farrow case is that there has been a gross injustice: Either an innocent man's career is being destroyed, or a victim has been unfairly doubted since she confided in her pediatrician about an assault when she was 7 years old.

I asked Dylan whether there was any chance that this was a false memory, that she had been brainwashed.

"No," she said flatly. "I think it's more logical almost that the people who accuse me of being brainwashed are brainwashed themselves by the celebrity, the glamour, the fantasy, the pull they have to Woody Allen, their hero on a pedestal."

The larger point, she said, is not her own suffering over the years, but the need to listen to victims.

That's where we have systematically failed — with gymnasts, with Harvey Weinstein's victims, with the Catholic Church and with innumerable girls and boys suffering anonymously at the hands of abusive coaches, relatives, family friends or bosses. One demographer's new estimate is that at least three-fourths of women worldwide have been sexually harassed.

Yes, false accusations happen, and we must struggle to balance rights of victims against those of the accused — but it should be obvious now that we haven't gotten that balance nearly right. Too often, we have deferred to the powerful and doubted the weak, creating impunity and injustice.

The problem is not only abusers but more broadly a society that often disbelieves or scorns those crying for help, like that young woman curled up on her bed crying during the Golden Globes. I'll leave her with the last word:

"What needs to change," she said, with a teary firmness that comes from 25 years of pain, "is our response."

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for *The New York Times* since 2001.



## YOUR VIEWS

### The future of EOTEC and Pendleton's Main Street

With EOTEC bleeding cash at an alarming rate and swimming in red ink, the Hermiston City Council, Umatilla County commissioners and fair board (the same group that decided EOTEC was the answer that would save the fair, a fair the rest of the county showed no interest in saving) have finally realized it's time to dissolve their partnership. The rosy picture they painted of the project, driven by emotion rather than sound economic principles, was a sham and the only way out is a taxpayer bailout by the county since no party really wants the liability or has the resources to operate the facility.

After giving up the half interest in ownership, it's proposed that we ante up \$100,000 a year forever so the fair board can rent EOTEC for six weeks. That's the amount of time they had to set up, put on, and clean up at the old fairgrounds. A luxury they could afford when the fairgrounds were county-owned. I get a feeling that we taxpayers have been conned and it's time for an auction.

Perpetuity, that's how long the Pendleton Downtown Association (PDA)

is asking for financial support from the city. That means forever, kinda like the IRS. That organization started as temporary and look at it now. Unlike the funding for the Chamber of Commerce, provided by the members and the transient room tax collected from overnight visitors, the PDA requested funding would come from property taxes. The credit they claim for any improvements downtown, other than Christmas lights, should probably go to Charles Denight, associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, who did and continues to do most of the groundwork.

The mayor gave the new city council a B- rating for the year and that sucks. Though I don't agree with some of their spending decisions, the council can only set the agenda with the mayor's guidance. It's up to the city manager and his staff to carry that out. Economic reality will determine winners and losers downtown, not the city council or the mayor. Look at the number of restaurants that have opened and closed in the past couple of years, while long time businesses such as Zimmerman's and Dean's continue to flourish.

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