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OTHER VIEWS

Too little, too late for children in foster care

The Medford Mail-Tribune

Oregon’s broken foster care system continues to make headlines, the most recent story details a heated legislative hearing in which a key senator said she has lost confidence in the state Department of Human Services. In response, the agency’s latest director complained about “public shaming sessions” and said staff members are “breaking their back” to ensure children are safe. Meanwhile, a national advocacy group has sued the state on behalf of 10 child plaintiffs, seeking class-action status to represent all 8,000 children in the Oregon system and asking for a court order forcing the state to fix the problems.

Two days after the lawsuit was filed, Gov. Kate Brown weighed in with an executive order creating a Child Welfare Oversight Board to develop solutions and a crisis management team to implement them.

Governor, that ship has sailed. The lawsuit lists horrifying details of neglect and abuse suffered by children supposedly under the state’s protection: A brother and sister, ages 7 and 8, who were in foster care for less than two months but were in four and five placements respectively. They had lice when they entered the system but waited more than a



Photo contributed by A Better Childhood

A barbed-wire enclosed exercise yard at the Youth Inspiration Program in Klamath Falls that girls share with juvenile inmates housed at the same facility. Children still under the care of Oregon’s foster care system filed a lawsuit April 16, 2019, alleging the state provided inadequate services and exposed children to abuse and further neglect.

month for treatment because caseworkers did not give their insurance information to foster parents. A 13-year-old boy who suffered physi-

cal abuse, allegedly by his father, resulting in 35 reports to the state. State workers left him in a home despite reports he was being sexually abused by another boy living

there, and he began defecating in his pants at school to protect himself from the other child, who was a schoolmate.

A 17-year-old Native American boy in and out of the system since 2005 who has been moved 50 times. He has never lived with any foster family who is a member of his tribe. And he’s about to “age out” of the system.

These are only a few examples. Brown told reporters last week, “We all in this state bear responsibility for what is happening in our foster care system.”

Yes, but as the state’s chief executive, the governor bears ultimate responsibility for fixing a system that is failing the children it serves on a daily basis. Those children cannot wait for an oversight board to “develop solutions.”

As Marcia Lowry, executive director of A Better Childhood, the nonprofit that filed the lawsuit, said of Brown’s plan, “It’s too little, too late.”

Her organization wants a court order to force immediate action. The state’s lawyers, however, want Brown removed as a defendant in the case.

If Brown is serious about fixing the problems, she will direct state officials to settle the lawsuit as quickly as possible, and agree to do whatever is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of all of Oregon’s children.

Anything less is unacceptable.



YOUR VIEWS

Justice system must change for the betterment of all

We should have Medicare for all and subsidized college educations.

The Republicans need to get on the right side of these issues.

I clearly believe that we already spend enough money on education to pay the bill, if we spent it properly. School vouchers must happen. We only need to get what we are already paying for. We must put competition into our education systems. College educations could be repaid with slightly higher tax rates by the individuals receiving the education.

We spend 25% of our gross national product on our medical system. England and France spent 13% to 15% on universal health care for all. We spend more on attorneys than those countries spend for complete coverage.

The bottom line is that nothing can ever change until we completely change our legal system. Our single-judge, 12-jury system is broken. If you have ever used talcum powder, ear plugs,

Roundup weed killer, any medication, hernia mesh, etc., you can call for your settlement money. This is really why our health care system is unaffordable.

Our insurance companies are in bed with our legal system. They just pass these ridiculous single-judge rulings on to their customers. A single payor system where attorneys can not win attorney fees would immediately change our society.

Other countries, and our military courts, all use a three-judge format where the judges also ask the questions. Their attorneys have to take the oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help me God. They are prosecuted if they lie. Our attorneys are rewarded for lying and our judges are just attorneys in black robes. Individual judges completely control the admission of evidence and the results of their trials. They should only be allowed to rule in front of the voters that elect them.

Our education and health care systems can not provide what we want until the “Justice System” is completely changed.

Kalvin B. Garton
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Has our luck run out?

The year 2019 will be remembered for a lot of things, but in foreign policy it may well be remembered as the year our luck ran out.

How so? The period after World War II was one of those incredibly plastic moments in history, and we were incredibly lucky that a group of leaders appeared who understood that this moment of Western and U.S. dominance would not necessarily last. It was vital, therefore, to look in our democratic values and interests in a set of global institutions and alliances that would perpetuate them.

They were leaders like George Marshall and Dean Acheson and Harry Truman in America, and Jean Monnet, a founding father of the European Union, and Konrad Adenaur, Germany’s first postwar chancellor, across the Atlantic.

In 1989, we saw another plastic moment, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Again, we were lucky that a group of leaders came together who peacefully managed the fall of communism, the reunification of Germany and the rise of a quasi-capitalist China. They were Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, George Shultz, George H.W. Bush, Brent Scowcroft, Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher, Francois Mitterrand and James Baker.

Now we are at another hugely plastic moment — a moment when the world is experiencing four climate changes at once: There’s a change in the climate of the climate — the hots are getting hotter, the wets wetter, the droughts drier, the forest fires fiercer. There’s been a change in the climate of globalization — we are going from an interconnected world to an interdependent one. There’s been a change in the climate of work — machines can think, reason and manipulate as fast, and increasingly better, than humans.

And there’s been a change in the climate of communications. Smartphones connected to the cloud are superempowering good people to be reporters, photographers, filmmakers, innovators and entrepreneurs — with a global reach — and they’re superempowering bad guys to be cybercriminals and breakers

with a global reach.

These four climate changes are creating a whole new set of governing challenges. They are not the obvious challenges of

communism and economic dislocation — as occurred after World War II — when building a NATO, a Marshall Plan and an EU were the obvious antidotes. And it is not the obvious challenge and opportunity of spreading democracy and free markets into the vacuum created by the end

of communism in 1989. It’s the less obvious challenge of stemming the erosion of the pillars of democracy and order built in the previous two eras — but without a single big, obvious boogeyman or falling wall to galvanize us.

I’m talking about disorder that comes from nation-states fracturing under the pressure of these climate changes and spilling out masses of refugees, triggering populist, nationalist backlashes all across the West. I’m talking about disorder spread by a Russia that wants to keep the West in turmoil.

The Russians are using a new kind of warfare that I call “Deep War.” Deep War uses cybertools to disrupt Western democracies and elections to discredit them as an alternative to Vladimir Putin’s autocratic kleptocracy and to maintain Russia’s freedom to intervene around its borders. But it operates deep beneath the surface and is not easy to retaliate against or even identify, and it’s very low cost, high impact.

I’m talking about the disorder that will come from more and more extreme ideas spread by social networks. This poison helps fuel the kind of violence we’ve seen in Sri Lanka, San Diego and New Zealand, and it erodes the truth needed to govern. And I am talking about the crushing of freedom that autocrats can now do so much more efficiently with cybertools, like facial recognition and big data, that favor centralized systems.

But this time it feels like our luck is running out.

The countries and leaders we counted upon in the past to build a global, systematic, strategic adaptation to these challenges — the United States of America and the United States of Europe, i.e., the European Union — are AWOL. And so is their secret

sauce.

And what was that? It is beautifully described in a valuable new book, “The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal,” by William J. Burns, who retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in 2014, after a 33-year diplomatic career that included serving as ambassador to Jordan and Russia and as deputy secretary of state. Jim Baker called Burns “one of the finest U.S. diplomats of the last half century.”

Burns’ argument is that what made American (and EU) leadership effective in the first two plastic moments was a spirit of “enlightened self-interest” — meaning that sometimes we assumed greater economic or leadership burdens to build a coalition or buttress allies because in the long run, as the world’s biggest economy, we would benefit most from the stability and the commerce those would generate. It advanced both our values and our interests.

Trump has gotten rid of most of the “enlightened” part of “enlightened self-interest” and focuses only on the “self-interest,” notes Burns. Trump’s approach, he adds, is more “transactional muscular unilateralism.” But its viability is yet to be proven anywhere.

And the EU is fracturing — thanks to a new generation of leaders who are not building big systems but just playing with them, like the Brits breaking the EU. A bunch of Conservative politician-clowns in the U.K. thought that they could push for exiting the European Union — without any preparation and by lying that it would be easy and profitable to do so.

We have never had a greater need for the EU and the U.S. to be led by people motivated by enlightened self-interest, who appreciate that virtually every problem destabilizing the world in this plastic moment is global in nature and can be confronted only with a coalition that is global. But instead, we are saddled with leaders who are much more adept at breaking things than making things — at going for broke rather than making the best of the bad.

It just feels like our luck is running out.

Thomas Friedman is a columnist for the New York Times.

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