

## OUR VIEW

# Progress in improving child welfare in Oregon

The reports from the Department of Human Services Critical Incident Review Team are some of the most heartbreaking things that the state of Oregon produces.

The team reviews child fatalities when there is a connection to the state's child welfare department within a year of the death. The CIRT reports aim to understand what happened and consider what, if anything, can be learned.

A CIRT report from 2020 looked into what may have been a suicide or accidental overdose by a 16-year-old in December.

Rewind back to 2016. DHS received a report about the child. The child was then 12 and struggling with mental health and self harm. That investigation was closed because no evidence was found of parental abuse or neglect.

Then in December 2019, DHS received a report when the child was 15. The allegation: The child was struggling with suicide and it was not being adequately addressed by the parents. There was also information that the parents let the child drink at home.

The parents initially denied the caseworker access to the home. Later, the caseworker was able to meet with the parents and learned they were aware of the child's problems. The mother told the caseworker that the school had contacted her with concern about a social media post from the child in December 2019. The mother said she stayed home with the child to ensure the child's safety.

The family had no health insurance. They did have resources through the child's school to access counseling. The caseworker interviewed multiple other people including school staff, family members and the child's therapist. They did not report concerns. Based on the investigation, the allegations of neglect were ruled unfounded. The parents seemed to be taking appropriate action. A year later the child was dead of suicide or accidental overdose.

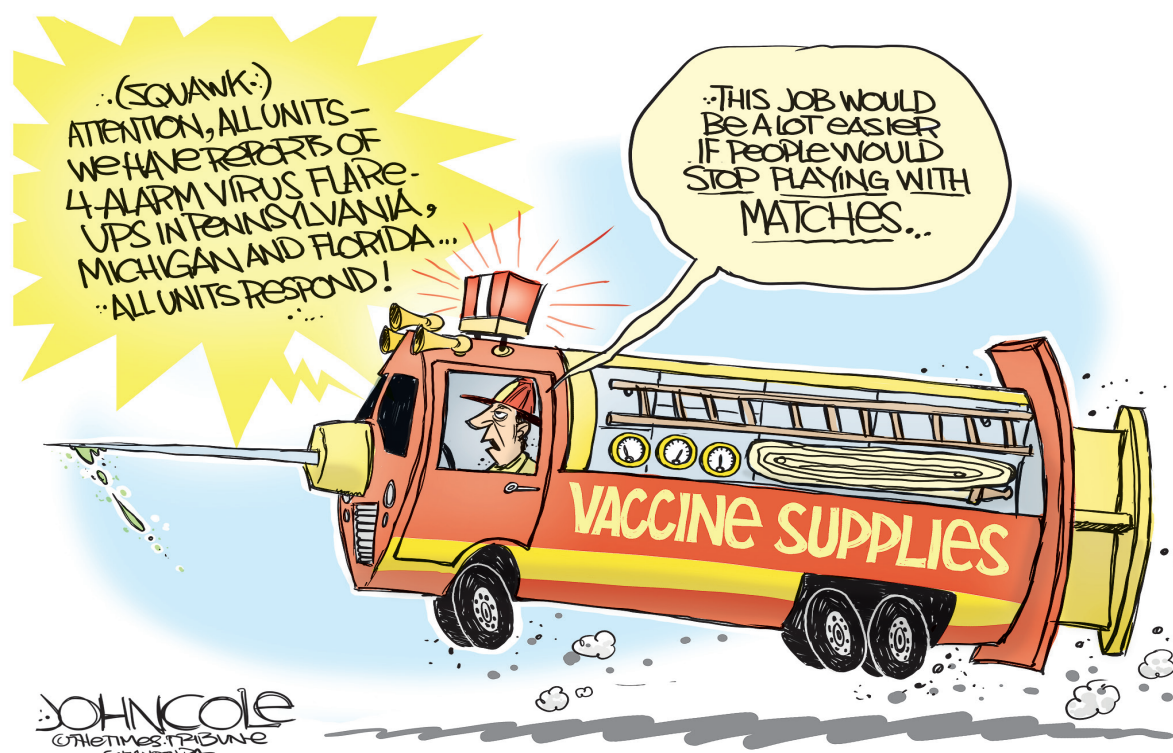
In child abuse and neglect, there are often missed chances to intervene or help. It's hard to point fingers and know for certain what more could and should have been done in this case, at least from the detail in the report. It doesn't really answer that.

Some, perhaps most, child abuse is preventable. What can make a difference is giving families in need the support — economic, mental health and more — they need to stay together and prevent children from being harmed.

A twinkle of hope comes from the Family First Prevention Services Act. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, worked on and got it passed in 2018. Child welfare advocates had long complained that the federal government was getting child welfare funding wrong. Federal money was available, though the majority of it was only available once a child was removed from a family. Shouldn't the government put more effort into giving families what they need to succeed? The act enabled Oregon and other states to get reimbursed for services outside of foster care.

The state of Oregon just received permission from the federal government to move ahead with its version. That is very welcome news. Oregon's plan includes offering families programs for mental health, addiction and recovery, resources for pregnant and parenting teens and residential treatment requirements. Will it prevent more child abuse? We don't know. We hope so.

There is more work to be done by Oregon's DHS to ensure it succeeds and that fewer CIRT reports must be written.



## The SKYWARN spotter — seeing things radar can't



ED TOWNSEND  
EYE TO THE SKY

All weather data has value, but some types are more valuable than others. For a meteorologist, a spotter report, or what we refer to as “ground truth” data, is extremely valuable. A spotter report is crucial when it comes to aiding our warning decision-making process.

When making these decisions our office relies heavily on radar, satellite, surface observations and weather models, but it's important to realize that they all have their own individual limitations. So, as we move into spring and our convective season, we are reaching out to our community in search of volunteers willing to become SKYWARN weather spotters. Why? Because when it comes to the limitations of our available data, we know that spotters can help us fill the gaps to make lifesaving warning decisions.

As you may know, one of our most used tools in the warning decision process is radar. Though radar is immensely valuable, it does have a few limitations. First, the radar beam increases in altitude as it moves away from the radar. Which means that by the time the radar beam gets to Central Oregon, the beam has ascended such that the lowest radar scan is exceeding 10,000 feet above ground level. As such, at these distances we are no longer sampling the lower portion of a storm.

Second, the width of the beam is also

increasing in size as it travels away from the radar. The end result is that we can have identical storms some distance apart that appear quite differently to the radar. For example, the storm farther away will appear weaker as the beam spreads while the closer storm will appear stronger.

While these limitations mean there are additional challenges when it comes to interrogating storms, we can mitigate these challenges by leveraging all of our other tools, including spotter reports.

In addition to radar, surface observations are another valuable tool that we have at our disposal. They provide the information on the ground level where we want it. However, the role of scarcity comes into play when it comes to surface observations — specifically, the number of stations and their distribution across Northeast Oregon and South-Central Washington.

That said, the surface observations we get, especially from our Automated Surface Observing System network, are reliable and of very high quality. In addition, we have access to other surface observation networks, including home weather stations, that we can utilize to help provide a better picture. Though useful, the limiting factors of surface observations is that there are a set number of them, they are unevenly distributed, they can't move and they only detect what is occurring at that singular location.

As you can see, the benefit of a SKYWARN spotter starts to become clear, especially considering our rugged and rural terrain. Spotters are the eyes and ears in the community and in the field; and a short training session will prepare

### MORE INFORMATION

The date and time of the next storm spotter class, along with spotter resources, can be found by visiting [www.weather.gov/pdt/spottertraining](http://www.weather.gov/pdt/spottertraining).

you to provide accurate and useful information. During the training we will review the spotter's role, basic safety, storm structure and storm feature identification.

We want to make sure that you not only know what to look for (for flash flooding: is the water level rising, staying steady, or falling?) but what you are looking at (is that a funnel cloud or a scary looking cloud?). Once you know what to look for, contacting us with information is easy.

Ultimately, radar, satellite, and surface observations are all tools that aid us in our mission of protecting life and property. A storm spotter can make a difference as they can see things radar, satellite and surface observations simply cannot.

Therefore, if you're interested in helping report hazardous weather for your community, which includes everything from hail, damaging wind, flash flood, heavy snow and any other hazardous weather phenomenon, please join one of our training sessions being offered this month and early next month.

*Ed Townsend is the science and operations officer for the National Weather Service in Pendleton.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Citizens need to stand up for what we believe in

For those not familiar with the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, this is what is said: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

Well, methinks that our leaders are all professional politicians. Not statesmen. That being said, the pandemic is a tragedy. It has exposed issues in America that endanger the freedom and order that we take for granted: the extortion of power; unilateral decrees closing of churches, restricting movement, closing businesses, directing behavior, suspending schools, and indefinitely stopping basic freedoms.

By the way, I spent 34 years on active and reserve time in the military. I once would give my life for this country for what I believed our country stood for. At this time, I will give my life to protect my family from what this United States has become.

### LETTERS DEADLINE FOR MAY 18 ELECTIONS

The *East Oregonian* does not run endorsements of more than 400 words. The *East Oregonian* will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary. We run the letters on a first-come, first-served basis. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 7. You can email them to [editor@eastoregonian.com](mailto:editor@eastoregonian.com), or mail them to *East Oregonian*, c/o Andrew Cutler, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run. Election Day is May 18.

I am not professing to overtake this country, but I am saying it is the time for all good men to stand up.

**Roesch Kishpaugh  
Pendleton**

### Spencer will do the right thing for students

The spring/summer of 2020 forced many of us to evaluate and prioritize our political, social and practical activity. Consequently, when activism driven by social injustice collided with COVID-19 restrictions and conservative mindsets, the results manifested as civil unrest and/or personal resentment across many parts of the state and nation.

As I reflect on the aforementioned time in the city of Pendleton, I appreciate the fact communication and respect were not compromised by emotion as they were in more urban areas. One of the pivotal people in the Pendleton experience was Pendleton School Board candidate Briana Spencer. Albeit Spencer's motivation is/was to bring attention to disparate national, state

and local trends surrounding cultural diversity, inclusion and equity — she readily acknowledged the importance of honoring processes and differing points of view. Her willingness to appreciate the totality of circumstances and engage others in constructive conversation not only served as indicators of her character, but also as catalysts to a favorable outcome.

I firmly believe fundamental character cannot be learned, which is why I wholeheartedly trust Briana Spencer will do the right thing even when it may not be the most desired or comfortable choice. Rest assured, any vote or decision Briana Spencer makes will be weighed against the interests of need, contemporariness, history, culture and bias, which are exactly the considerations school board members should contemplate before setting precedence or memorializing policy.

This letter is an endorsement of Briana Spencer and should not be misconstrued as denunciation of Patrick Gregg, whom I do not know personally.

**Stuart Roberts  
Pendleton**