

What stories are you listening to?



BETTE
HUSTED

FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

Stories surround us. Which ones have you been listening to? Maybe you've been grateful for the comfort of the familiar sounds coming from the Round-Up Arena and the voices of children returning to school playgrounds at recess.

Or maybe you have been sobered by the stories from Afghanistan and from veterans who lost friends there or left friends there. The 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks has brought new focus not only to the losses of that day but the sacrifices our culture has made to fear and a reassessment of our place in the world. And then there's COVID-19 and the delta variant, hospitals struggling to keep up, lost loved ones.

Lately I've been finding inspiration in David Treuer's essay "A Sadness I Can't Carry: The Story of the Drum" from the Sept. 3 issue of New York Times Magazine. Treuer was hit hard with the deaths of both parents and the loss of his marriage, and devastated by the unexpected deaths of two close friends, one after the other. Like all of us, he's struggling. But the essay is about his Ojibway culture's way of dealing with grief by sharing

it, and by others' willingness to help bear his personal grief through the ceremony of the Big Drum.

This practice began, he says, around 1850. One hundred years after the Ojibway had attacked and driven the Dakota people away from their forests and out onto the plains, the Dakota returned with a big drum and a way to help their killers and their own survivors deal with guilt and grief. As we know, killers inflict grief upon themselves as well as others. In these ceremonies — which are open to outsiders — members of the drum, often veterans of wars, wash the tears of those who are grieving. They literally wash their faces, braid and comb their hair. If I understand Treuer's explanation correctly, they absorb some of the grief, help the sufferers carry it.

Humans have found many ways of offering consolation, but I find myself wishing

these ceremonies were common in my own culture. Imagine if we could wash away each other's tears. Even on Sept. 11, 2001, Treuer says, when he burst into a room with the news that something terrible had happened, almost immediately a drum appeared.

Sometimes what we need even in the midst of pain is laughter. If that sounds good to you, I recommend "Ted Lasso," which you can find on Apple TV. It's a story about kindness, believe it or not. Well, and soccer. Or "football" as the Richmond Greyhounds would insist we say. And yes, it's also about grief and dealing with grief. But even the toughest footballer of them all, the great, growing Roy Kent, is kind. "Kind but not nice," fans joke.

I don't drink coffee, so it's easy for me to say — but for the price of a latte, you too can watch Ted Lasso and find the comfort of a

kindness that's deeper than nice.

Friends, of course, help us bear our griefs. Friends and family and, yes, poets. They help us look straight on at even the most difficult things, help us face them, absorb them, take them into our own bodies. They help us learn to survive being human.

How many of us have turned to Mary Oliver's poem "Wild Geese"? "You do not have to be good / You do not have to walk on your knees / for a hundred miles through the desert repenting ... Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine." Or W. H. Auden's "September 1, 1939," when he acknowledges that "we must love one another or die" and tries to "show an affirming flame." Even the title of Adam Zagajewski's poem in the New Yorker's first issue after the 9/11 attacks — "Try to Praise the Mutilated World" — was a gift.

Whatever stories you have been turning to this month, I'm guessing that the words heard most often at Big Drum — wiidookodaadidaa, "let's help each other" and zhawendidaa, "let's care for each other" — apply. And let's wish each other well, because as the Ojibway and Dakota people have learned, it takes a special kind of courage to be kind.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of tai chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

What's in store for the 2021 school year and beyond



DIRK
DIRKSEN

OTHER VIEWS

Education is all about taking the long view.

The school-age years go by quickly, but the lessons, skills and confidence students learn will last for a lifetime. The Morrow County School District has not only the responsibility, but the honor to play a role in those important developmental years.

As we head back to the classroom this fall, we're keeping those long-term investments in mind.

Our mission is to make the most of this time for students in the classroom, on the field of competition, at concerts and performances, out in our communities and everywhere else they're learning and growing.

We carefully plan to put our financial resources to their best use year by year and over the long-term, considering the impact of every dollar we spend and looking to invest in Morrow County's young people — our future.

One way we help students prepare for that future is by giving them the educational tools to focus on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, arts and music through STEM and STEAM programs. We're finding these opportunities often spark the interest of students who otherwise might not be engaged with their education, helping them explore possible careers and lifelong passions.

Through a \$868,000 Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facility grant, each community and school will receive dedicated funding for

specifically tailored staff and programs. In 2021, this will fund science, technology and music teachers throughout the district as well as facility renovations to create the best use of the space we have.

We are also doing a careful review of all our current facilities to ensure we are anticipating repairs as we care for these community resources. Maintenance costs have the potential of eating into a school district's budget if problems aren't addressed, and ongoing costs caused by a leaky roof, aged HVAC system, or other inefficiency aren't a good use of those dollars.

Our school buildings play a vital role in each of our communities, and we want to make sure they continue to function at their best for years to come.

Health and safety have become a growing concern in schools, and we're able to address a wide range of needs through our wellness hub partners. These services include CARE coordinators, nurses, mental and oral health professionals, resource officers and workforce coordinators.

For every \$1 the school district invests in our students' health and safety, our partner agencies pitch in \$1.13. Like all our investments, the health and safety of our students is a fundamental building block of a successful life after graduation.

It can be easy to get caught up in the immediate challenges, and there are more than a few to start this school year. But as we work through them, we're keeping our eyes on the end goal and what's best for our students and communities.

Making the right investments today will pay big dividends in the future.

Dirk Dirksen is Morrow County School District's superintendent.

Don't skip teaching an essential life skill



SCOTT
SMITH

EDUCATION CONNECTION

We all have busy lives filled with activities from the moment we wake up until our head hits the bed. Yet quite often, at some point in the day, you might hear "I'm bored" or "I don't have anything to do" from one of your kids. Some child-development specialists say we often fail to teach our children one important life skill, dealing with boredom. In addition, children's days are filled with activities planned by others and can find it difficult to direct themselves to an activity of their own interests.

In her research, Sandi Mann from the University of Central Lancashire looked at what we often associate with boredom, lack of something to do. When we view boredom from this lens, it allows children to depend on others for their activities, and restricts their creativity. This is not just at home but in our educational system as well. Our schools have cut recess times for students greatly over the past 20 decades. This has impacted children's abilities to develop friendships, work with others, and create activities with others independently.

Who would have ever thought making sure that our kids always had activities and events to attend or do might be harming them? Developing and learning how to create their own interests and fill their downtime is a life skill we expect our children to execute. Yet, as adults, we often experience frustration when our children face downtime. The child hasn't learned or developed the skills to fill this unknown time. Instead, they become dependent on others to fill their day with activities,

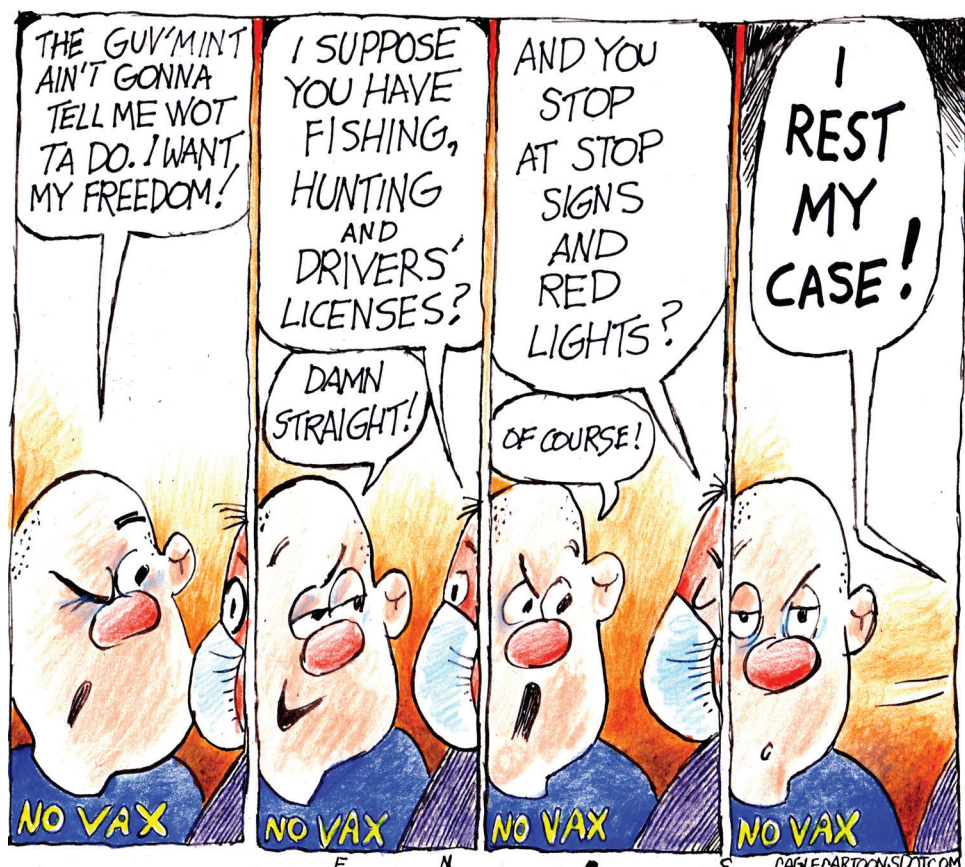
and when faced with unplanned or free time, we hear, "I have nothing to do, I'm bored."

Providing a "downtime" where a child has to spend time on their own is not free time for the parents at first. Learning not to be bored is a process and takes time. You cannot start with 60 minutes of "downtime." You have to build up to 60 minutes. Start with 10 minutes and provide a couple of choices, such as reading a book or drawing a picture. When you hear those beautiful words, "I'M DONE!" All you have to say is, "You still have more time to choose something else." This is where the learning takes place, so be ready for the pushback. Stick to the 10 minutes. After a bit, you'll be able to increase by five-minute intervals. Just as you cannot run a marathon the first time out and must build your endurance, the same is true in learning how to deal with boredom. By providing your child with downtime, you can teach them how to engage in activities independently and not depend on others to create activities for them.

Some schools have cut their recess times during the school day because of the demands on instructional time and to avoid dealing with student misbehavior. They found that cutting recess time cuts down students' misbehaviors, yet is that best for them? Instead of using this time as a teaching/developmental time, schools shorten the time to run and play, shortening the time to practice these developmental skills.

We so often assume children can use free time for productive things when it is a skill that parents and teachers need to foster. Take the time to guide children out of boredom and model and share what you are doing during your downtime.

Scott Smith is a 40-plus year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.



Oregon committee is creating a single-payer health system



CHUCK
SHEKETOFF

OTHER VIEWS

I am one of 13 gubernatorial appointees and voting members of the Joint Task Force on Universal Health Care created by the 2019 Legislature. In June, we released a status report presenting our current thinking on the design of a universal health care system. Our proposal is a work in progress, not final.

Our plan will not be "Medicare for all." Medicare requires premiums, co-pays and private insurance companies for supplemental or advantage plans. In contrast, we propose a single-payer plan. A new public corporation would be created to bear the financial risk that insurance companies and self-insured businesses carry today.

Our plan could "help fix some problems by making health care accessible to more people and more equitable." And there's ample room for cost control and lower administrative costs.

A new health care system will indeed make Oregonians "happier and healthier" by improving quality of care.

A major challenge is improving how we access health care, especially "uncoupling health insurance from employment." And, our plan will ultimately need support from the public, our businesses and the Legislature.

In Oregon today about half of private insurance is purchased through employers. The Legislature rightly considers the cost of employer-provided health insurance as both tax free income to employees and a deductible expense for the employer.

That deduction, not available to Oregonians buying individual policies, coupled with the tax break for employees, reinforces our dependence on employer-provided insurance. We want to equalize access to health care with a different method of payment: progressive fees and taxes providing health care access to everyone regardless of employer. Our task force is confident that the new payroll fee to fund health care will be less than the cost of employer-provided insurance. We expect Oregon families will welcome a plan that is not tied to their employer; that eliminates premiums, co-pays and deductibles; and that ends battles with insurance companies

to approve a provider or benefit.

Employer-provided insurance hurts Oregon's economy. The employees receive lower pay and the impact on pay is regressive: Employer-provided insurance premiums take a bigger share of income from lower paid employees than from higher paid employees.

Our approach, which is still evolving, favors a moderately progressive payroll-based fee, meaning less impact on employees receiving lower pay. Like the insurance premiums that employers currently pay, a payroll health care fee would be a tax deductible business expense.

However, because a payroll health care fee will be less than the insurance premiums most employers pay today, our plan will improve profitability, pay and benefits to workers, or both.

Today, all families and individuals pay at least something for health care, even those Oregonians with limited income who seek alternative care not provided by the Oregon Health Plan. Under our plan, funded by progressive taxes, Oregon families won't have premiums, co-pays or deductibles.

Our task force is committed to ensuring that any new taxes will be less than what Oregonians currently pay for insurance, co-pays, deductibles and noncovered services.

Consistent with our legislative charge, we created a consumer advisory committee with representatives from a wide array of Oregon communities and interests. We encourage public testimony at our open meetings. We listen to all contributions and have included them in our planning. With bipartisan support, the 2021 Legislature extended our timeline to present a plan. This renewal of our charge provides funds for even more rigorous engagement with the people, organizations and businesses that our task force needs to honor.

We hope your readers will consider contributing their ideas to our critical work. Vibrant public participation will help create a health care system that is universal and that answers the needs of all Oregon families and businesses.

Chuck Sheketoff submitted this piece on behalf of the voting members of the Task Force on Universal Health Care. Readers can get involved and follow the task force's work at bit.ly/JTFUHC21.