

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.

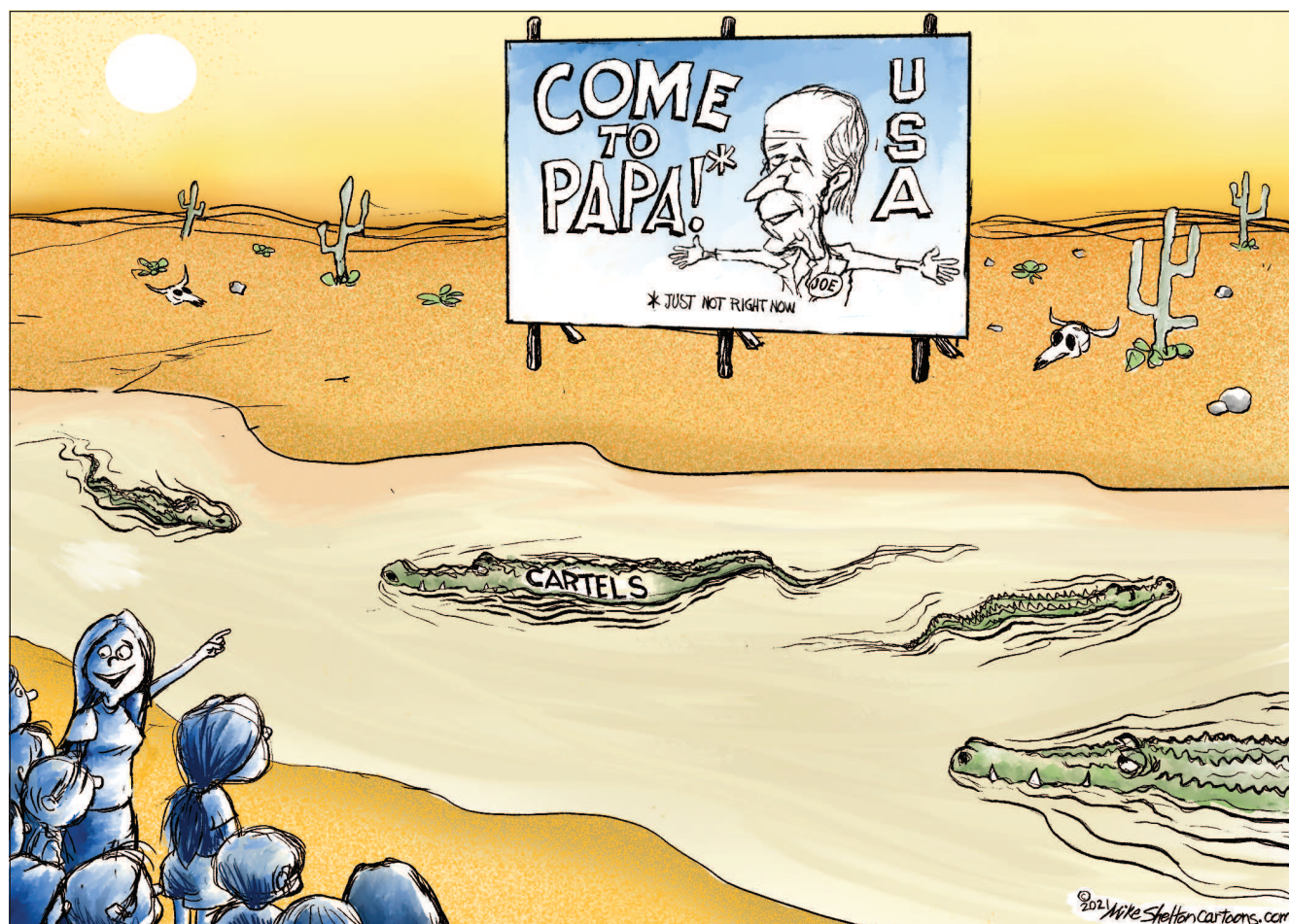
In child abuse and neglect, there are often missed chances to intervene or help. It's hard to point fingers and know for certain what more could and should have been done in this case, at least from the detail in the report. It doesn't really answer that.

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.

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Speak out against B2H power line

By Fuji Kreider

People ask, "Is that still going on?" Yes, it's true the massively destructive Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) transmission project is still under review. Each time we've asked folks to speak out, it's more critical that they do.

Thursday, April 15, is the final hearing at the Oregon Public Utilities Commission on Idaho Power's 2019 energy plan, which features B2H. The OPUC commissioners have been impressed with the number of public comments already received, and now is the most important opportunity to speak out with your reactions to Idaho Power's power play.

Building the line will guarantee them cost recovery and a hefty 7.6% profit based on the project's \$1.2 billion cost. Good for them. Bad for us.

In 2015 when I started tracking these plans (integrated resources plans), the Idaho Power Company claimed it needed 351 megawatts of energy by 2026 to replace energy from coal plant closures. Rather than building its own resources to satisfy this need, the company wanted to buy energy from the Mid Columbia energy trading hub and transmit it hundreds of miles away. That's where the B2H comes in.

Closing coal plants is definitely worth supporting. But destroying hundreds of miles of private and public lands, habitats and sacred places — in addition to us footing the bill — is not

the way. Contrary to the company's green-washing narrative, there are many ways for it to get or make the energy it may need.

Now, after six years and three IRPs, the "need" has been reduced from 351 MW to 42 MW — and in the Idaho's PUC review, the company states the need will be only 5 MW by 2029! This reduction has been occurring even with Idaho Power actively resisting more solar and wind contracts, battery storage or building any of its own energy resources. It has discouraged renewable energy projects through state legislation and is de-incentivizing rooftop solar among customers. The industry's innovations, appliance and building efficiencies, and people's own conservation, continues driving down the need.

That's right — 42 or 5 MW of energy need by 2029? They can easily make that up with a small solar farm or simple energy efficiencies, respectively. My point is: There is plenty of energy and energy generation potential in Idaho. The "need" can be easily canceled. So without a need, why the B2H? For Idaho Power it's all about profits. Not only through the guaranteed return on investment on the capital project (B2H), but the company can continue to gain profits through transmission tariffs. At the Oregon Public Utilities Commission the discussion has evolved into "regional grid capacity and resiliency," and "costs to the ratepayers." (Since the BPA is currently a partner in the B2H

that means that we, as Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative members, are also ratepayers in this arrangement.)

I've asked for an analysis on upgrading and reconducting the three lines that go from the Mid Columbia Hub to Idaho, from 230-kilovolt to 345-kV lines. The increased capacity of these three lines could yield a total of 345 kV more capacity. These lines could be fire-hardened; they could be digitized and the corridors could be cleared out — all benefiting actions bringing much more security and resiliency into the current system while reducing fire risks.

If Idaho Power really needed the capacity in the future — which is questionable — the Oregon PUC (the regulators in this case) should order the company to study upgrading before planning and building new!

There won't be another opportunity to influence the OPUC for at least another year, and by then much more work will be completed in the permitting process. Not good. Therefore, we need to tell the OPUC: Do not acknowledge this project any longer! We can't afford it and it is not needed. Write now (before April 15) to puc.publiccomments@state.or.us. For more info, check out www.stopb2h.org.

Now is the time to act!

Fuji Kreider has lived in La Grande 34 years and is a member of the local nonprofit Stop B2H Coalition.

OTHER VIEWS

Restore limits to media ownership

Editorial from The Seattle Times:

The U.S. Supreme Court last week upheld the Federal Communications Commission's wrongheaded decision to allow more media consolidation.

This comes amid a crisis in local journalism, an epidemic of misinformation and growing division undermining America's democracy. Media consolidation and the resulting disinvestment in local news are worsening these problems.

The FCC, as reconfigured by President Joe Biden, should revisit the issue and restore limits on cross-ownership of media outlets.

Specifically, the agency should restore rules preventing media companies from owning both a newspaper and radio or TV stations in a single market, and limiting the number of radio and TV stations a company can own in one market.

These rules, adopted in the 1970s, are needed to preserve the diversity of local media and prevent further consolidation.

They were whittled away starting in the 1980s and finally discarded by the FCC in 2017, prompting a federal lawsuit by Prometheus Radio Project, a Philadelphia-based advocacy group.

An appeals court upheld the FCC's decision but found it didn't adequately consider the effect on minority and female ownership of media outlets.

On April 1, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the FCC decision and accepted its ownership-diversity analysis. Justices decided that even if the FCC's diversity data wasn't great, its decision wasn't capricious and the commission still had authority to change the rules.

"In assessing the effects of the rule changes on minority and female ownership, the FCC did not have perfect empirical or statistical data," the court wrote. "But that is not unusual in day-to-day agency decision making within the executive branch."

Ugh. Also disheartening was the FCC argument, restated in the ruling, that the rise of cable and internet outlets meant these ownership rules "no longer served the agency's public interest goals of fostering competition, localism and viewpoint diversity."

Actually consolidation has resulted in less local news to inform voters, as shown by researchers at Stanford University and others, and reduced the diversity of media viewpoints.

The proliferation of websites and cable channels is not increasing reporting. Total investment in journalism declined, with newsroom employment across all media types and information services falling 23% from 2008 to 2019.

It's worse among newspapers, the

source of most original reporting, where newsroom jobs fell by half over that period. That occurred as waves of consolidation left 25 companies controlling around two-thirds of daily papers in the U.S.

As trustworthy local news outlets fade, Americans turn to social-media sites riddled with falsehoods and cable channels stoking division and doing little to inform voters of local issues.

The silver lining is that the Supreme Court ruling affirmed the FCC has authority to help make things right.

"The way I read it, that means the FCC has broad discretion to enact substantive, meaningful ownership rules," said Michael Copps, a former FCC member now advocating for diversity in media ownership.

This should be a priority for President Biden's choice to fill an open seat on the commission and selection of its permanent chair. Biden's interim FCC chair, Jessica Rosenworcel, is a strong proponent of media diversity, competition and localism.

Much has changed since the FCC embraced media consolidation in 2017.

The Prometheus decision, and the local news and misinformation crises, should prompt a new assessment of market conditions, public interest in a diverse media ecosystem and restoration of cross-ownership rules.