EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

The Bulletin
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

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Consider new kind of housing for Bend

For a starting teacher or a starting police officer, finding housing for a family in Bend can be too pricey. Single people can find they don't want roommates — they need them to afford to live in town.

Not everybody that wants to live in Bend has to live in Bend. But if the city wants to continue to attract the best talent, it needs to continue to hunt for solutions.

What if the city of Bend could partner with businesses to help provide housing for employees? Where housing pressure is acute, communities are exploring those options and others. You'd expect it, perhaps in Silicon Valley, in Aspen, in New York City. But it's happening all around the country.

The government doesn't have to be involved. If Bend, though, could leverage federal dollars it would open up a lot of possibilities. City staff told us it is investigating what might be allowed. So, it might not happen. It wouldn't be because of lack of trying.

In some places, businesses have stepped up. They help with financing for apartments. For instance in Tillamook, Tillamook Creamery pledged to fill some apartments to help secure financing for a new apartment building. The city of Aspen and Pitkin County in Colorado has long had lotteries for employee housing in that community. In California, voters in the San Mateo School District passed a bond to build a 100-plus-unit apartment complex for school faculty and staff. And of course, much closer to home are the efforts in Sunriver to build employee housing for Sunriver Resort.

Oregon, as a whole, does not do well in some national rankings of affordable housing. It has one of the lowest rates of housing available for people who are extremely low income, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. And unfortunately, low-income renters are also disproportionately people of color.

It is to be expected in Bend or any place where people flock to live that a premium will be paid to live here. But Bend should not just concede that teachers, firefighters, nurses, police officers and so many other employees don't deserve to live here as well as work here.

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State goes after more taxes when it has a bulging budget

The state of Oregon's revenue picture is nothing short of stunning. It could be bulging with $1.8 billion more in its two-year budget than it expected in February. Income taxes surged.

The state budget picture was already looking a rosy shade of rosy before the most recent budget projection. The $2.6 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act was going to fill what had been anticipated to be a $1.3 billion budget gap.

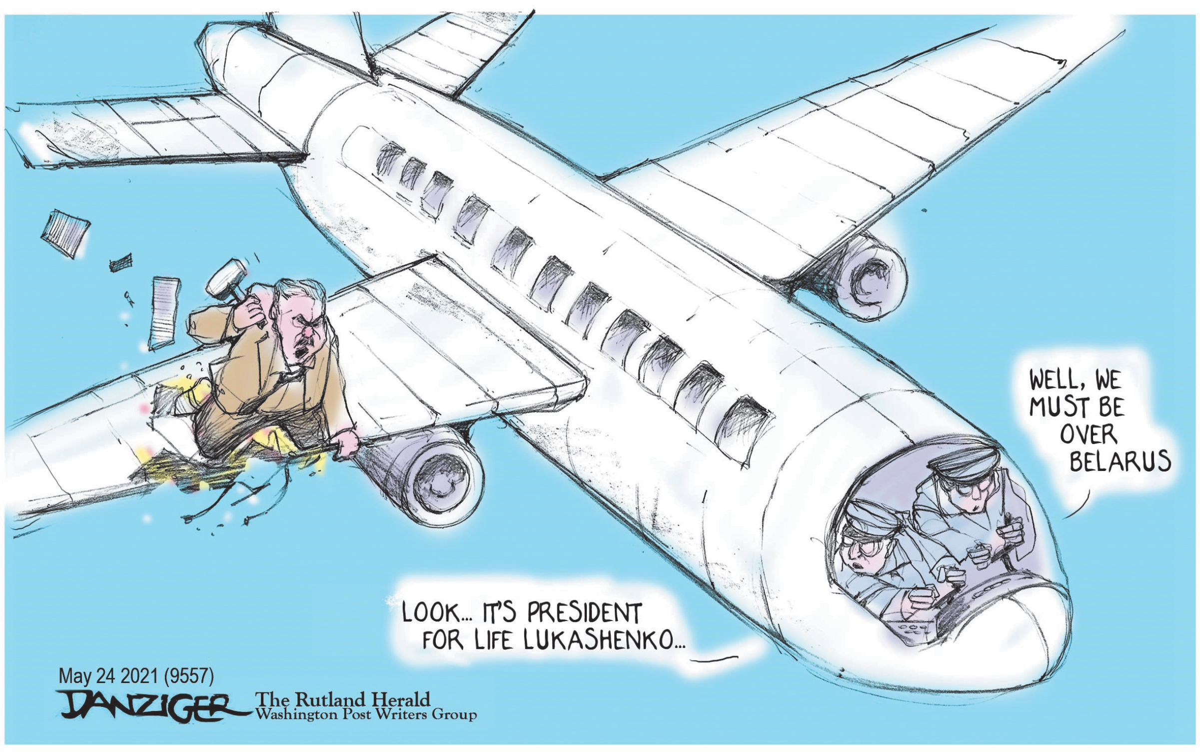
Then earlier this week, in the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue, a proposed amendment was dropped that was no less stunning. It aimed to grab more revenue. From businesses. When Congress did not intend the money to be taxed.

Which legislator or legislators proposed is not disclosed on the amendment. That is not stunning. It's an all too common practice of legislative secrecy, preventing voters from being able to hold legislators accountable.

The amendment proposes to tax forgiven Paycheck Protection Act loans. The amendment would exempt the first $100,000 in loan forgiveness. Full disclosure: The Bulletin benefitted from a PPP loan.

Remember, Congress passed the PPP to help businesses in desperate pandemic times. It helped prevent the country from dipping into a horrible recession. And despite that help, many businesses still went under. Many employees were let go. Now the state of Oregon plans to go after those dollars even when the state budget is bulging with billions? Congress did not intend that the PPP loans would be taxed as income when they were used as intended. The money is not needed by the state. Do legislators need more reason than that to let the amendment die?

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.



Managing conservation in the Upper Deschutes has its complexities

BY BRIDGET MORAN

GUEST COLUMN

With a river that serves as the backbone of both our human communities and wildlife species, sustainable water management is a balancing act that has taken years to achieve in the Deschutes River Basin. Years of research and collaboration among managers, biologists, hydrologists, and other experts have gone into the effort to ensure critical water needs are met for Central Oregonians and our wildlife. Recent articles and discussion in The Bulletin have debated these issues, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would like to highlight our perspectives regarding the complexities of water management in the basin.

One of the species dependent on the Deschutes River, the Oregon spotted frog, has been central to the Service's conservation work in the basin since it was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2014. More than half of critical habitat designated for the species occurs within the Deschutes River Basin, underscoring the importance of the area to conservation and recovery efforts. An entirely aquatic species, spotted frogs require water year-round for all stages of their life history, including breeding, rearing, and overwintering.

Ensuring the life history needs of spotted frogs are met in the Deschutes River, which has been heavily altered from a century of water management, is challenging. In particular, the highly regulated stretch from Wickiup Dam downstream to Bend is at the heart of a long-standing conservation issue surrounding the extreme seasonal flow changes that are inherent to irrigation water management.

The legacy of storage and release operations has altered the physical structure of the river, the extent of surrounding habitats, and the behavior of spotted frogs as they move between seasonal habitats. Dams in the upper basin store water through winter for irrigation in summer, leading to winter flows insufficient to inundate the slough and wetland habitats that extend high onto the floodplain due to decades of artificially high summer flows. Even historical (pre-dam) flows now would fail to reach floodplain habitats where they exist today and could no longer support spotted frogs.

The recently approved Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) addresses water management to better support spotted frogs and other ESA-listed species. The HCP outlines conservation measures that modify the timing, volume, and duration of irrigation releases to align with life history needs of spotted frogs while continuing to deliver water to central Oregonians consistent with Oregon water law.

In general under the HCP, flows (1) increase in April to support spotted frog breeding by raising water levels to these adjacent habitats, (2) are managed within specific parameters during spotted frog rearing (April-August), and (3) are sustained in-stream later in the season to help spotted frogs move into overwintering habitats without getting stranded. While frogs might benefit biologically from higher flows during certain life stages, these flow increases would come at a cost to other life stages at other times of year because the upper basin has a finite capacity of water. In short, while many can suggest the best flows for frogs, no single flow volume really tells the story of what is best for spotted frogs overall.

To ensure our recovery efforts are well-informed, the Service collaborates with other experts from the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and many others to gather data, monitor biological activity, provide guidance on water management decisions, and a host of other activities.

While there are varied opinions on how to manage the river, our experts rely on the best available biological and hydrological data to inform the Service's decisions, including our recent finding that the HCP meets applicable requirements under the ESA. We value the community's interest, welcome your engagement, and hope that you continue to partner with us to help the spotted frog continue its conservation journey toward recovery.

For more information about the Deschutes HCP, go to tinyurl.com/DeschutesHCP.

Bridget Moran is Bend Field Supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

There's a massive child care worker shortage; the market can't fix it

BY ELLIOT HASPEL
Special to The Washington Post

Parents of young children have had a rough pandemic, facing down closed playgrounds, closed pools and closed child care centers. While states have largely opened up, these parents now face a knock-on crisis: Child care programs are contending with massive and unprecedented staffing shortages, leading to fewer spots and long waiting lists. The rotten seed of America's disinvestment in child care has finally sprouted, and without a new, permanent source of public funding, the sector is likely to crash and pull working families down with it.

Child care programs have long struggled with staffing because wages are so low: The national median is $11.65 an hour, and around half of programs don't offer health insurance benefits. The current moment is an order of magnitude worse. For much of the pandemic, child care programs were struggling with under-enrollment as parents worked remotely or stayed away for fear of their child bringing COVID home. Now, programs are struggling to handle a surge in demand. Since day cares must follow mandated child-to-adult ratios, a lack of staff quite simply means they must serve fewer children.

The problem cuts across geography and ideology; waiting list stories have cropped up from Ohio to Texas, and it was recently reported that one of rural Iowa's few large centers may have to close temporarily due to staffing challenges. Kim Hulcher, executive director of the Virginia Child Care Association, wrote in an email that "critical staffing shortages" have led several of her members to cap enrollment and stop accepting parent applications altogether.

The impact isn't restricted to families with children below age 6; many child-care programs also provide before- and after-school care to elementary-aged children. When Ann Arbor Public Schools discontinued district-affiliated child-care services for the upcoming school year, the primary reason given was staffing shortages.

Unlike a short-staffed restaurant that may need to curtail operating hours or menu options, child care programs are cultivating the academic and socioemotional foundations of a generation; forcing them into a lurch is frankly dangerous. Children thrive on consistent, reliable relationships, and effectively providing care and education for a group of 3-year-olds requires skill. Child care is about the last sector in which you want to see high churn and programs scraping for warm bodies. Yet here we are.

There is only one solution: public investment. Child care programs don't obey the classic rules of supply and demand; many experts consider the sector a failed market. Parents are already tapped out, but the obscene prices they pay don't come close to covering the true cost of care in such a personnel-heavy enterprise. Only programs serving the most affluent can reasonably charge more to boost wages.

In one important way, child care mirrors the rest of the economy: Raising compensation works. A study of child-care teacher turnover in Louisiana in the journal Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, found more than 44 percent of teachers in private child-care programs leave every year, nearly all exiting the profession altogether (by comparison, about 16 percent of K-12 teachers leave each year, half just going to a different school). However, for the better paid Head Start teachers and the yet-better paid public preschool teachers, turnover was only around a third and a quarter, respectively.

President Joe Biden's American Families Plan (AFP) sets a goal of a $15 minimum wage for child care practitioners, an improvement that would however return the industry to its pre-pandemic fragility. The AFP also states those with similar qualifications to kindergarten teachers would achieve pay parity, although this wades into an ongoing debate about credentialing for child care educators and how to honor the experience and expertise of a workforce substantially made up of older women of color.

An alternative is the adoption of publicly supported sectoral wage scales. Several states have developed such scales, although none are fully implemented. For instance, a recently proposed scale in Minnesota would ensure entry-level classroom support roles — requiring a 120-hour certificate — start at $18.20 per hour, moving up from there toward parity with K-12 teachers.

More philosophically, the nation needs to ask itself a question: Do we really want programs caring for toddlers and their rapidly developing brains to be competing for staff with fast food joints and big box stores (worthy of a decent wage as those employees are)? Do we want market forces determining whether parents have viable, quality options for their care/work arrangements? There is a reason we don't expose fire departments or public schools to the invisible, raw hand of capitalism; child care programs are equally essential to the functioning of society and the development of children.

Elliot Haspel is the program officer for education policy and research at the Robins Foundation in Richmond, Virginia.