

Should the county invest in public health for students?

Kids need to be back in school. Once that's stable, the new challenge will be making up for any learning lost.

But the old challenges have not gone away.

Deschutes County has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the state. The county rate is 18.9 suicides per 100,000. Suicide is preventable. About 90% of people with suicidal intent that receive intervention do not die by suicide.

Use of e-cigarettes is spiking in Oregon. And substance abuse in Deschutes County youth trends higher than in other parts of the state. About 29% of county 11th graders reported e-cigarette use in a 2018 survey. Binge drinking and marijuana use among 11th graders were both at about 20%.

Teens and young adults also have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections across the county. In Deschutes County about 30% of the chlamydia cases have been in people 19 and younger. And there were 25 teen pregnancies among 10-17 year-olds in the county in 2019.

Those factors can sabotage a student's ability to learn. They can derail the ability of students to get jobs. They can damage students physically and mentally.

Teachers can teach. They have less expertise with these other issues.

Almost a year ago Bend-La Pine Schools went to the county for help. They proposed a novel partnership with the professionals at Deschutes County Public Health. The county would embed health educators in schools to work with students on health promotion and prevention. It was going to be a three-year pilot.

If ever there was an issue that deserved a thorough policy debate, it was this. It didn't get it last year. Commissioners had questions. Nobody from the district was there to answer. The school district's own budget meetings conflicted with one county meeting. District officials were not notified that it was going to be discussed at another county meeting. No surprise, the county didn't fund it. It was a failure that such an important issue got scant attention. Commissioner Phil Chang, elected in November, made that part of his election

campaign.

This year, on Tuesday, the Youth Success Partnership got the debate it deserved. School board member Melissa Dholakia was joined by other school district staff at the county. Leaders of the county's health services department explained the program. The cost would be about \$323,000 in the first year and \$770,000 by the third year. That's primarily personnel with 5.8 FTE at the end of the third year. The county and the district would split the cost, 50/50.

Yes, it's a lot of money for an unproven program. But there are social costs and financial costs that it might offset. Outpatient substance abuse treatment can cost \$8,000. A teen pregnancy can cost double that. And those are just immediate costs. The plan is the program's performance would be measured to attempt to demonstrate if the investment works.

Another consideration is fairness. If such a program works, Sisters and Redmond school districts deserve to be able to participate. That would mean even more county money.

And a third issue is the other competing needs for county dollars. The Youth Success Partnership is just one of many worthy, additional requests for money in the county budget. It was actually put behind others in priority in the proposed budget. It's behind things such as a new perinatal care position (net cost about \$89,000), converting a substance abuse prevention position to full-time (net cost about \$32,000) and more than six new positions in the county's behavioral health and adult services programs (net cost about \$480,000).

Of course it would be nice to do all of them. Commissioner Chang told us commissioners won't likely decide until Friday when they weigh all the requests and the money available. Should services that will help more adults come first? Should kids come first? Is that even the right way to weigh the options? At least this year, the county and the school district ensured the Youth Success Partnership got a fighting chance.

Deschutes has a \$9.2M surplus in tourism taxes

Weighing special requests for funding — as we described in today's other editorial — isn't the only budget challenge Deschutes County commissioners face. The county has a surplus of some \$9.2 million in its tourism dollars. What should it do with the money?

This is money from transient room taxes. The tax is paid by people staying overnight in lodging in the county's unincorporated areas.

For the last several years, the county has underestimated how much that would bring in. The surplus or technically "unallocated" money is money left over after the county fulfills its commitments to the Central Oregon Visitors As-

sociation, the Sheriff's Office and the county's environmental health efforts.

The county can't just spend the surplus however it likes. Just how such tourism money can be spent has been an ongoing battle in Oregon. Basically the rules have been that it has to be related in some way to tourism or the additional burdens tourism puts on the community. The county might consider using it for a big ticket item — courthouse expansion. It could give more to the Sheriff's Office to reduce the need to raise tax rates. It could keep some in reserves, among other options. If you have an opinion, let the commissioners know. You can email them at board@deschutes.org.



My Nickel's Worth

The border is a travesty

In Sen. Jeff Merkley's recent virtual townhall, he dismisses concerns about rampant illegal immigration and repeats the adage that immigrants have lower crime rates than citizens.

One has to wonder what the senator would say to the parents of Mollie Tibbets of Iowa who was brutally stabbed to death in 2018 by an individual here illegally, or the parents of Sara Root killed by a man here illegally from Honduras who was street racing while legally intoxicated and ran into Sara's car, killing her.

It is estimated by Pew Research that over 12 million individuals live in the U.S. illegally and the number is growing with more than 178,000 apprehended at the border in April.

According to the Oregon Department of Corrections, more than 6% of the felons in Oregon's prisons are here illegally and cost taxpayers \$33 million per year.

Under President Biden's "open border" policies, many are simply released into the U.S.

A majority are looking for higher paying jobs, but if only 1% of the 12 million commit a serious crime, that adds up to 120,000 crimes that would not have been committed had these illegal migrants been prevented from entering the country.

Most citizens support legal immigration with reasonable numbers allowed in who will be vetted and required to learn about our government and laws.

What is occurring on our border now is a travesty and should reflect badly on our senators and president.

— Larry Nelson, Bend

Losing the glue

This Memorial Day as I watched our city's familiar ceremony, I was struck by a few things. First, the crowd of folks was smaller than ever — and this a trend. Second, the crowd of faces was aging. Third, and most importantly, I saw that the reason we few still show up no longer resonates with younger folk ... or even with older folk who have no service connections. Fourth, I glimpsed a future where nobody shows up — a Memorial Day become a sterile political ritual devoid of deep meaning.

I am not criticizing the lack of caring evidenced by others. They have not had the same life-changing experiences we had. How can you know how we feel about our comrades, living and dead, when you have never been part of a team where job performance is a matter of life or death... when you have never lost a loved one who was serving...when you have not spent years turning strangers into brothers and sisters; sharing long patrols and living a code of values that is uniquely military.

No, I don't blame anyone... it just is. For my part, I am proud of my time in the service. I was able to help save the lives of my countrymen in time of war. These experiences shaped the rest of my life into something I am proud of. I am truly glad that we are not so deeply engaged in war anymore, but I think we are losing some of the glue that used to bond us.

— Anne Graham, Redmond

Follow up on reporting

I am concerned about The Bulletin's reporting focus and the safety of our community. Your Wednesday 5/26 edition contained a front-page story about the removal on Tuesday of a camp shelter next to a highway, while a more serious threat caused by a fire Monday at an apparent transient camp in the Deschutes River canyon received scant attention. The Bulletin published only a short press release from Bend Fire & Rescue inside the same edition.

The fire was caused by an explosion at a camp in the canyon below SW Bend neighborhoods. Bend Fire & Rescue responders had to downclimb a very steep and dangerous cliff face to reach the fire. Their quick response and the lack of wind avoided a disaster for the neighborhoods.

The Bulletin's Wednesday and Thursday editions did not have any reportage on the cause of the explosion, any people cited, any hazardous material remaining, or the response of Bend authorities to this threat. This site had been reported to the authorities.

In contrast, the front-page story on the structure removal contained photos and multiple interviews with the camper and representatives from ODOT, code enforcement, and homeless services. The reporter quoted the representatives as expressing concern about the fire risk posed by a structure next to a highway. No one expressed concern about the fire risk posed by transient camps in hard-to-reach areas of the city.

The Bulletin should focus its limited reporting resources on the fire threat to neighborhoods posed by camps, and Wednesday's edition is an ironic example of misplaced attention.

— Dave Norton, Bend

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.

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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.

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Manic housing market needs a calming dose of deregulation

BY MICHAEL R. STRAIN
Bloomberg

The U.S. housing market is on fire, with the supply of available homes falling drastically short of pandemic-stoked demand. Worrywarts are calling it a "crisis" and circulating weird tales of buyer desperation — including one about a supplicant in Bethesda, Maryland who apparently offered to name her firstborn child after a seller — and warnings of stunted recoveries. Or maybe the thing to fear is another speculative bubble, like the one that set off the 2008 global finan-

cial crisis.

The better way to think about the hot market is more prosaic: Demand for houses is booming as the pandemic recedes, and supply can't keep up because of both temporary and longer-term factors.

Short-term causes notwithstanding, the imbalance is likely to persist. So states and localities should use it as an opportunity to rethink regulations that make it harder to expand the supply of housing.

Data released last Tuesday show that housing prices are soaring, grow-

ing by 13.2% for the year ending in March, according to the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller Home Price Index. That represents the biggest increase since December 2005.

My colleagues at the American Enterprise Institute Housing Center report similar growth, 12.6%, and find that prices grew rapidly for low-cost and high-cost housing.

Each of the 40 largest metro areas experienced price growth of at least 7% in March relative to one year ago, with prices in Phoenix and Austin rising by over 16%.

Demand for housing is booming. According to a National Association of Realtors survey, there were an average of five offers made for every home sold in April. Houses stayed on the market that month by a median 17 days, down from 27 the previous year. New-home sales are at their highest levels since 2007, and sales of existing homes are up, too.

Surging demand is meeting limited supply. The share of houses that are unoccupied and on the market is at its lowest level since the 1970s.

To address it, policymakers should

focus on the root of the problem: supply. Soaring home prices can be an opportunity to take on the entrenched interests that make it so difficult to roll back land-use, zoning and permit-related regulations, freeing up land and making it easier and less costly to build houses. More houses mean lower prices.

The path to affordable housing lies with deregulation.

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