

We can't keep failing the most vulnerable

Oregon's foster care system needs to enter the 21st century. A scathing audit conducted by the Secretary of State's Office makes that clear. Caseworkers are overworked and exhausted, foster families are in short supply and children suffer.

The state Audits Division began the audit a year ago. The results, though disturbing, should not come as a surprise. Oregon's leaders have long known of the problems, and a series of administrators have promised improvement.

That turnaround finally might be underway. In releasing the audit report, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson criticized the culture and performance of the Oregon Department of Human Services, but he praised its new leadership.

The top administration has been doing such simple but important things as visiting DHS field offices throughout the state, talking firsthand with front-line workers. DHS Director Fariborz Pakseresht, who took over in September, and his top managers regularly hold town hall meetings to update and listen to employees, advocates and the public.

The most critical concern is to recruit, train and retain far more caseworkers and foster families. Richardson said the state needs nearly 800 additional caseworkers and related staff. Foster parents deserve higher compensation to cover their costs. And the state's supposedly state-of-the-art foster care computer system, like other IT projects, is a frustrating mess.

Meanwhile, Texas has a real-time system for tracking available placements for foster children, whereas Oregon too often houses children in hotels while caseworkers send emails desperately seeking an available family.

Oregon state Rep. Knute Buehler, the Bend Republican who is running for governor, responded to the audit by calling for a special bipartisan commission to recommend specific reforms that could be implemented within 90 days.

That is a good idea, even though Pakseresht has accepted the audit report's recommendations and vowed to follow through. But during the 35-day legislative session that begins Monday, Oregon lawmakers need not wait — they dare not wait — to add caseworkers and help foster children.

This audit report belongs on every legislator's desk, not on the shelf.

If you think you might be willing to help fill the gap in foster care, call 800-331-0503. A foster care specialist will answer initial questions and provide a contact name of a Department of Human Services worker.

The foster parent is given a stipend and must provide food, shelter, clothing, a sleeping area and other basic necessities. He or she serves as the primary contact for the child's school, makes day care arrangements, schedules extracurricular activities and drives them to their medical, counseling and court appointments.

It is a brilliant opportunity to help children in need of compassion and care.



WHERE TO WRITE

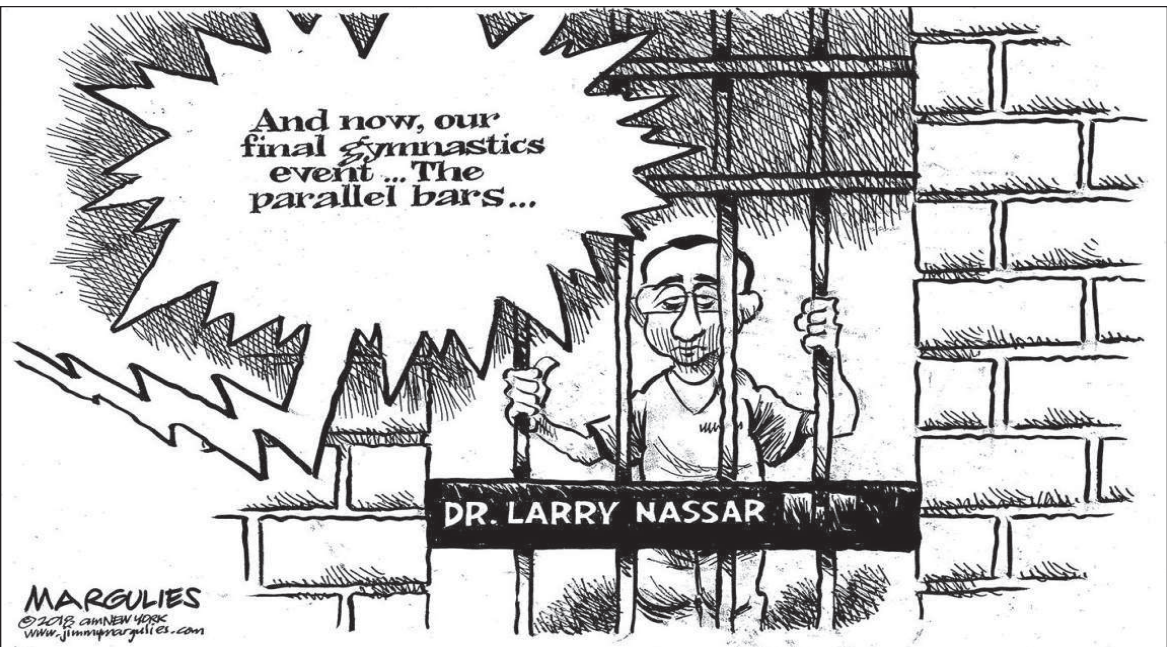
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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Email: rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm.



GUEST COMMENT

The myths of sex abuse

By Jim Carpenter and Mara Houck
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

The intense media coverage of Larry Nassar, former physician for USA Gymnastics recently sentenced to up to 175 years in prison, raises the question: How could Nassar get away with abusing so many victims for so long? Victims reported the abuse to authorities as early as 1997. Below we address some widespread myths about sexual abuse, which make victims reluctant to come forward and cases difficult to prosecute.

“There’s no evidence. It’s just he said/she said.” The testimony of a victim is the most fundamental form of evidence. In the vast majority of cases, only the victim and the abuser know what really happened. It is obvious abusers choose to abuse their victims in secret. Jurors are instructed “the testimony of any witness whom you believe is sufficient to prove any fact in dispute.” Why do we believe, without any physical evidence or other witness, a victim of a mugging, who says he was held at gunpoint and forced to hand over his cash, and not a victim of sexual assault?

Dr. Peter Palacio, of VIVA!GYN in Bend, stated 85 percent to 95 percent of examinations performed on children after a sexual assault have no abnormal physical findings. The American Journal of Obstetric Gynecology reported findings suspicious or diagnostic of abuse occurred in less than 5 percent of abused children and concluded, “The genital examination of the abused child rarely differs from that of the nonabused child.”

Dr. Lauren O’Sullivan, an OB/GYN in Bend, agreed there is no “virgin test” to definitively prove whether a female has had intercourse. According to Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine,

DNA evidence left by an abuser is unlikely to be found more than 24 hours after an incident of rape, and extremely rare past 72 hours.

“Even a kid would say no to that.” Abusers groom their victims. Most sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the victim trusts. Abusers often start with something less serious, like a touch they can pass off as accidental or innocent, to see how the victim will react, and gradually escalate the abuse. Children are predisposed to trust and defer to their parents, church leaders, coaches and other elders. Abusers build an environment where a child may not even realize what is happening is wrong, or think nobody would do anything to help if they told.

“(S)he took it all back or didn’t report it right away.” Studies show recantation — taking accusations back and claiming it was all made up — occurs in well over half of child sex abuse cases. When the full impact on the victim’s life is felt, he or she frequently makes an emotional decision that returning to the way things were, even with continued abuse, might be preferable to the stress of seeing a sexual abuse case through investigation and prosecution. Recantation rates are higher when the abuser is a close family member, or when the victim’s family is unsupportive and takes the abuser’s side. The journal Child Maltreatment found 66 percent of children recanted when at least one family member expressed disbelief of the child’s experiences. The journal Child Abuse Review determined children who are abused by a family member are less likely to disclose at all, and more likely to delay disclosure, than children who are abused by a non-relative.

“(S)he changed the story.” Incomplete reporting is common in sex abuse cases. Victims often disclose part of, or a less serious ver-

sion of, the actual abuse to gauge the reaction from the person who hears it. An unsupportive reaction will frequently result in recantation. A supportive reaction results in a more complete disclosure when the victim is believed. Material changes in a victim’s story are the result of how the human brain reacts to trauma. The Journal of Traumatic Stress compared children’s memories of traumatic events to those of positive experiences and discovered memories of trauma, especially sexual trauma, often contain less sensory detail and coherence.

“(S)he’s lying to get attention.” Dr. Palacio recently stated the rate of children false reporting is between just 2 percent and 8 percent. In a study of 2,059 reports of sexual assault in eight U.S. communities, only 7 percent were classified as false. The attention an abuse victim receives is negative. Families are torn apart as members decide whose side to take. Victims are publicly ridiculed, judged and called liars. Every unrelated bad decision a victim has ever made is spun to paint the victim as willing, as deserving or as untrustworthy. However unjustly, the victim, not the abuser, is made to bear most of the burden of blame, guilt, fear and humiliation.

Nassar’s victims gained credibility by sheer force of numbers, with more than 150 brave young women eventually speaking out. Most sexual assault is not perpetrated by the hundreds, but by ones and twos — committed by parents, parental figures, relatives, family friends and other trusted individuals. It is time to believe those survivors too, even if their experiences don’t match up with the “myths” of sex abuse.

To learn more, visit rainn.org or rapevictimadvocates.org.

Jim Carpenter is the Grant County district attorney. Mara Houck is the Grant County chief deputy district attorney.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Will Walden co-sponsor HB 4760?

To the Editor:

The U.S. has granted six amnesties since the big Simpson/Mazzoli amnesty of 1986. In each case, the federal government has refused to agree to future immigration enforcement without granting amnesty first. Then it ignores enforcement. By now, most citizens know that granting amnesties so that we can earn the right to enforce our laws later is like negotiating with burglars to get some of their stuff back — someday, maybe.

HB 4760 would change that. It ends the visa lottery and chain migration. It would build a wall and begin an e-verify program to turn off the job magnet. The bill would also reduce legal immigration to allow our entry-level citizens to get a first shot at jobs. It even legalizes 675,000 DACA recipients and their immediate families as a humanitarian gesture.

True to form, Oregon Congressman Greg Walden is ignoring it. His seven-term history is full of lip service for immigration reform as long as it doesn’t stand a chance of passing. But unless our government finally serves citizens first, it will only enshrine the precedent of mob

rule. So, will Congressman Walden co-sponsor HB 4760?
Lyneil Vandermolen
Powell Butte

Adopted highway neglected

To the Editor:

Highway 26 west from the old mill corner in John Day to mile marker 160 at the turn-off to Malheur Lumber has not been cleaned up since before it was “adopted” July 1 by a business. The business name is prominently displayed under an “Adopt-A-Highway” sign indicating that the roadside will be kept clean of litter and trash by that entity. This has not happened. If you have concerns about the lack of responsibility, contact Oregon Department of Transportation, John Eden, permit specialist, Region 5, District 14, 1390 SE First St., Ontario, OR 97914, 541-823-4016, 541-216-1246 (cell).

Louis Crabtree
John Day

Tabloid sensationalism

To the Editor:

On Jan. 25, a highly inflamma-

tory article appeared on the front of The Firehall Press, entitled, “Leave Boyd Alone!” by Caleb Maplesden. It certainly was an attention-getting headline.

I imagine copies flew off counters in every business. It was also an extremely misleading headline worthy of tabloid sensationalism. Most disturbing were allegations that “some of the radicals in Grant County” were behind “threats of full-on violence” toward Commissioner Boyd Britton. A horrifying lynch-mob type scenario was used to help the reader “visualize” the threats. I’m certain the sheriff’s department would have been notified of any violent threats. It appears now that this over-blown article was written after a couple hang-up calls. I get computer generated calls that result in hang ups all the time. The editor of the Fire Hall Press appears to have used this “rumor” to smear certain individuals within the county. It is, at the very least, irresponsible reporting. It also begs the question, why has Boyd Britton not responded to this article in order to lay to rest the rumors? No apologies have been forthcoming from the editor or Britton.

Patti Yellow Hand Bull
Monument

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