

Solutions for child care recovery

Rural Oregon is facing a difficult post-COVID economic recovery. The \$1.9 trillion federal coronavirus relief package will undoubtedly help, but without addressing some long-standing barriers to economic development, we will not grow and thrive.

The lack of child care is one of those barriers. We live in a child care desert, where the number of available slots is a fraction of the need.

Without adequate and affordable child care options for children younger than age 5, a laundry list of problems arises:

- Parents (women, mostly) who want to work or attend school may need to drop out of the workforce or college, harming their family's long-term economic future.
- Employers trying to recruit and retain employees have limited options, as potential workers are not available.
- A "brain drain" ensues, as professionals leave rural Oregon to pursue their careers in areas with more child care options.
- Rural school districts suffer from diminishing student enrollment year after year, as young families move away.
- When there are few preschool options, many 5-year-olds are not ready to learn when they start kindergarten, which undermines their chances of future academic success.

A strong child care system is needed to solve these problems. The Ford Family Foundation's recent report, "Child Care in Rural Oregon," charts a path to improve the quantity and quality of child care. Their five recommendations should be quickly enacted.

Their first recommendation is for the Oregon Department of Human Services to use data from surveys of child care providers across the state to accurately model the actual costs of providing child care, to calculate reimbursement rates that are fair across the state

and don't put rural areas at a disadvantage.

Second, do away with the state's current system of paying more for child care in urban areas than is paid in rural areas, and permanently waive or significantly lower the co-payments for low-income families who receive child care assistance.

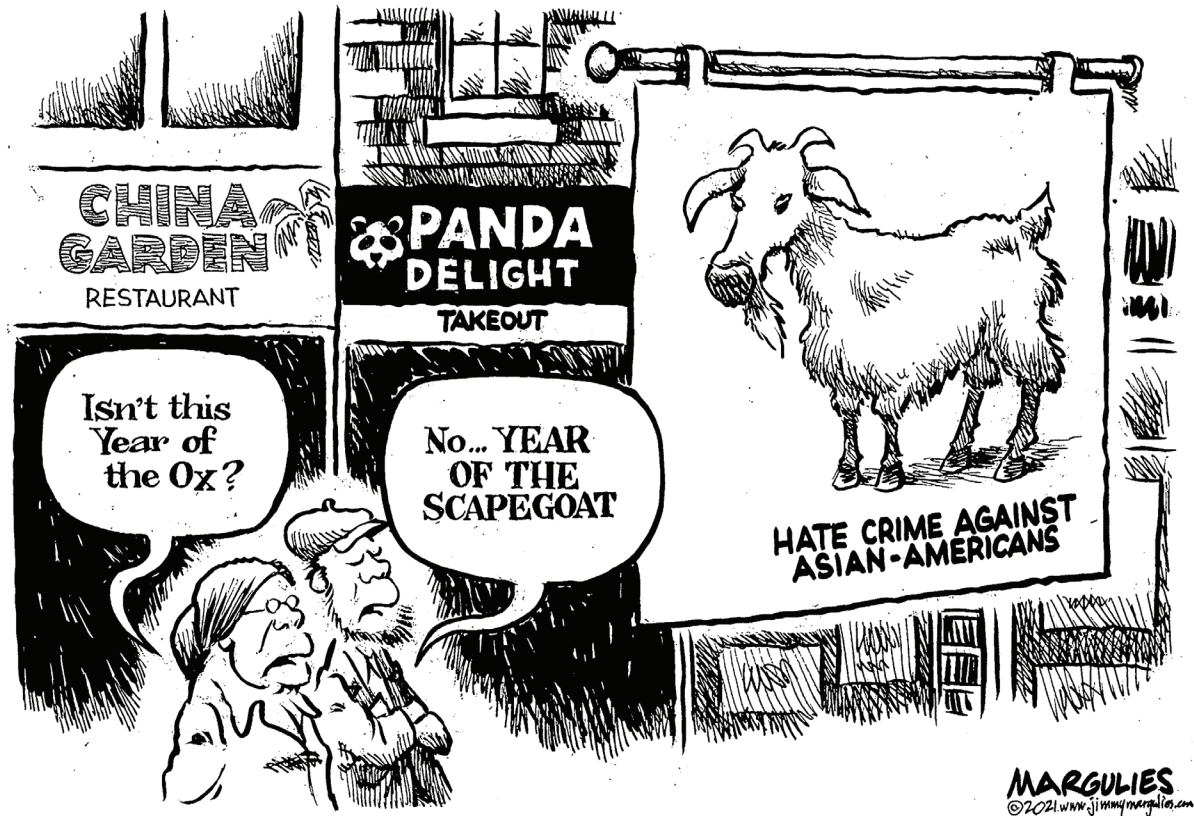
Third, recognize that both home-based child care providers and child care centers need consistent and reliable funding. They need to receive payments based on a child's enrollment rather than their daily attendance.

Fourth, launch a statewide system to link child care provider networks so that administrative services such as book-keeping and payroll can be shared by home-based child care and child care centers across the state, lowering costs for all.

Fifth, make changes in Oregon's child care regulations to allow small child care centers to be located in non-residential settings, so they can be licensed as "Certified Family Child Care." This would allow for mixed-age groups of up to 16 children in "micro-centers" located in schools and other existing buildings.

These steps don't solve the underlying problem causing the shortage of child care: This care is expensive to provide because of the high caregiver-to-child ratios needed for the safety of very young children, and is not subsidized by the government except for very low-income families. The brunt of the cost of child care is primarily borne by families. For many families, child care costs more than their mortgage, and can be as high as college tuition.

Ultimately, we as a nation need to face the fact that a child's education does not start in kindergarten. It starts at birth, so the more tax dollars we spend on high-quality child care and education, the less we will spend on remedial services and social welfare systems, and the better off we will be in the long run.



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GUEST COMMENT

Need for foster homes greater than ever

One harsh reality of the pandemic often goes unnoticed: the continued need for foster parents.

Similar to many regions across the state, Eastern Oregon faces a critical shortage of foster homes for youth in need. Unlike many other areas, however, these rural and frontier communities have a history of joining together to address complex challenges facing their most vulnerable populations. We don't see it as an "agency" problem to fix but rather find support through community collaborations and from the care of foster families.

In Oregon, an average of 7,345 children are in foster care on a daily basis, according to state data from 2019. Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., (GOBHI) has a foster care program that provides homes for youth in local communities involved in the child welfare system or for those youth being supported by their local community mental health program. Our agency certifies foster families and works in partnership with the Oregon Department of Human Services Child Welfare to provide additional support services to youth and our foster families.

The ongoing need for foster families is well known. However, the pandemic has increased uncertainty for both youth in foster care, and foster families. Despite this challenge, the people caring for foster youth are making remarkable accomplishments in the lives of youth every day. These families make lifelong positive impacts on the youth they serve, and are crucial to the success of our communities.

I'm honored to work with and support our foster families. Whether



Adam Rodakowski

the child they serve stays with them for a few days or becomes a permanent member of the family, foster families have the unique ability to be the stable, supportive adult during a challenging time in the life of a child. That leads us to the common question: How does the system work?

GOBHI is licensed by the state of Oregon to certify and provide homes for youth in local communities who are involved in the child welfare system, or are receiving care from their local community mental health program. We certify homes for children and teens ages 4 to 17. In 2019, we certified 54 homes in 18 counties.

GOBHI's Therapeutic Foster Care program is a higher level of service and support than you would find through traditional foster care. We empower foster families to provide a safe environment that supports a healing process for our youth. Foster families receive training and ongoing support to help them create that type of environment. Training topics include trauma-informed care, de-escalation techniques, working with biological families, cultural awareness and evidence-based parenting practices. Each home receives an assigned case manager to support them and the youth in their home. Our team is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide support and guidance.

Help doesn't stop at the case management level. Foster Plus is a 10 social service agency collaboration. Its purpose is to connect kids

in need with the support and stability of committed, caring foster families. GOBHI leads this collaborative group dedicated to increasing the number of safe foster homes and supports other agencies to improve services to children.

The positive impact that a foster parent can have on a child lasts a lifetime. We often hear stories of children who may have spent less than six months in a foster home but later in life contacted their foster parent to express their gratitude.

"Deciding to be a foster parent was rather scary for us. Now I can say, I wouldn't trade it for anything else. I've seen such a difference in their life, and also in ours. The GOBHI team was right there along the way and that's exactly the type of support we needed," a foster parent said.

If you have wanted to find a way to help children — especially those children in your own community — this is a way to do so. You will be ensuring that all kids in Eastern Oregon know they are wanted and safe during a very scary time in their lives.

If you have even considered fostering, please reach out. There are two options for people looking to become a foster parent:

- Full time: A child may reside in your home for 6-24 months
- Part time: Children will reside in your home for 2-14 days

Everyone can help in ways small and large. We welcome anyone who's ready to make a change.

Adam Rodakowski is the director of Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.'s Therapeutic Foster Care program. Patrick Mulvihill, GOBHI communications coordinator, also contributed to this article.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

City needs to look up the definition of 'no'

To the Editor:
In an article in the Eagle, the headline read "John Day continues push for study session with county." The key word is "push." The last two requests were a lecture to the Grant County Court and in another was to the Grant County Chamber of Commerce. This lecture was a spiel to the court about the court's inability to handle the people's money responsibly. This turned out to be an insult to the county by anyone with a small amount of intelligence. Not long ago the city went on another push with their idea of creating yet another taxing district. The good people of this county, overwhelmingly, said no. We the people of this county are getting tired of it. We are one of the most financially secure in our part of the state. We did not get here by spending money on projects that, No. 1, are about a failing ideology that "if you build it, they will come" or, No. 2, borrowing large amounts of money on the hypo-

thetical theory of "potential revenue through a government program" (urban renewal agency in this case).

In this recent city council meeting, the city's "push" plan is to include School District 3, the hospital district and to the county one more time, to leverage the minds of the population and baiting strategy to reach their ideology visions. When Mayor Lundbom brought the current manager to this county it has been a "push" for a "my way or the highway strategy." Their money-leveraging plan has come to a point where they have firm deadlines to finish one stage for a designated timeline. If they do not meet this timeline then they will not be able to put in for more free money. Fourteen projects started, and the city has run out of money. The city admits they have no money. This is the city's fault and not ours. Pure and simple. We all must live within our means, and borrowing just to meet your obligations is not a winning strategy in any business. The city needs to look up the definition of "no."

Bob Pereira
John Day

'The defeat is going to come from the inside out'

To the Editor:
Fifty years ago I received a draft notice. Doing the right thing, I answered the call.

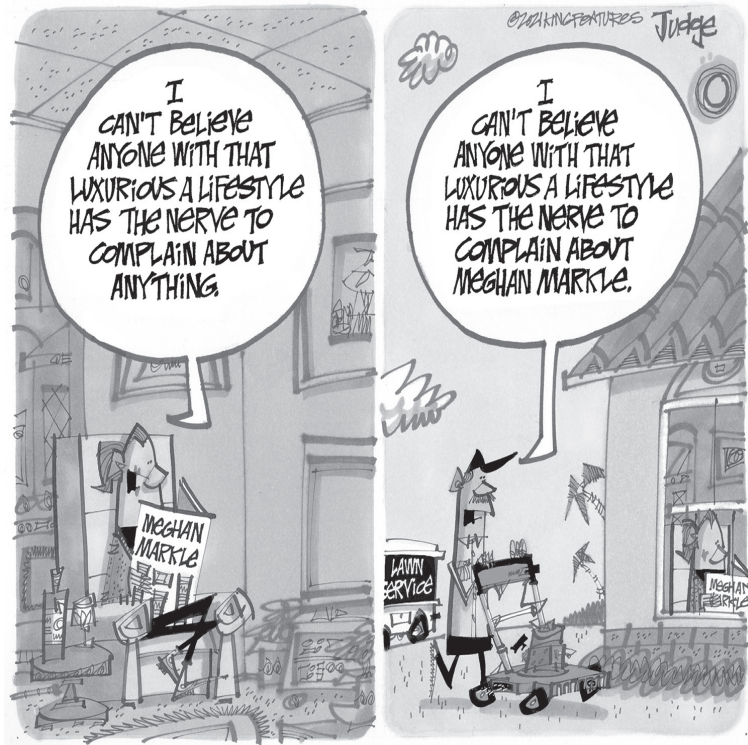
Somewhere along the line in boot camp my company (a group of about 75 boys not knowing what was going to happen to us) had a World War II Navy chief as an instructor. We didn't know if we would end up as door gunners, on a riverboat or who know what.

The chief calmly explained to us, "Don't worry — you guys will never be shot at. The defeat is going to come from the inside out."

Sure enough, chief! Fifty years later it's happening.

If the American people and so called honest politicians don't do something soon our grandchildren aren't going to know how it is to live in the greatest country on Earth.

Eddy L. Negus
Prairie City



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