

Commentary

OP-ED P

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WHY THE LACK OF OUTRAGE OVER THE WAY OREGONIANS TREAT WHAT MANY CLAIM IS "OUR MOST VALUABLE ASSET"?

Accepting the challenge of our children

Society's response to what's happening to our children today reminds me of the boiled frog phenomenon. If you drop a frog into a pot of boiling water, the frog will jump out to save itself. But if you put a frog in a pot of water and slowly heat the water to the boiling point, the frog will stay in the water until it boils.

Scientists offer this explanation for the frog's self-destructive behavior: As the water gradually heats up, the frog becomes almost paralyzed by what's happening around it. In a way, it gets used to the heat and, by the time the temperature reaches a deadly level, it's too late for the frog to save itself.

That's what I see happening with respect to our children's futures. As the president and chief executive officer of Morrison Child and Family Services since 1992, I've witnessed firsthand the way we're eroding our kids' future. And, as board member of Children First for Ore-

gon, I'm quite familiar with that nonprofit's signature product: its annual Report Card on the Status of Children in Oregon.

This year, the state's overall grade was a D+, the lowest score since Children First began tracking the state's performance in 1992. Yet in the weeks since that report card was released, I've seen nothing to indicate that anyone is concerned about it.

Why the lack of outrage over the way Oregonians treat what many claim is "our most valuable asset"? If you pay attention to our behavior, as opposed to

our rhetoric, you know that we are not investing as if children are our most valuable asset.

Our politicians are very attuned to those signals. Their very survival in the political arena rests upon their sensitivity to what people really care about. And it isn't children. Certainly neither of our top presidential candidates has made children's welfare a top priority.

If candidates thought voters cared

about kids, they'd be debating how much money should be spent on public schools, not how, or even whether, we should fund them. They'd be debating how much to spend on keeping children safe from abuse, from neglect, from the toll drugs and alcohol takes on our kids every day. They'd be talking about the escalating incidences of kids who are sexually abused or who are sent to prison.

But they're not.

They debate many weighty issues: war, Social Security, abortion, gun control and same-sex marriage. They argue about a national debt destined to be absorbed by today's children — but only about its impact on current voters.

And they aren't debating such issues as the critical lack of health care coverage for poor children or hunger among the same kids. This reveals that our top politicians think the average voter

doesn't particularly care about "our most valuable asset." And it is a damning indictment of American adults, who have always known that children, like politicians, pay more attention to our behavior than to our words.

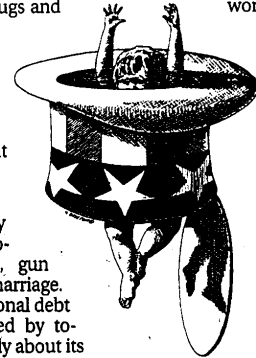
If you truly believe that children are our most valuable asset, you no doubt want to make a personal statement to show your commitment. Mentoring is an excellent entry point into serving children. Volunteering with a nonprofit that works with young people is another. Whatever you do, don't just sit there.

The frog is starting to boil. Let's act, not just lament.



IN MY OPINION

Jay Bloom



Jay Bloom is president and CEO of Morrison Child and Family Services, a nonprofit devoted to helping at-risk children and families.