How to fix the national child-custody wrangle

Listening to people argue about politics these days is like going into a restaurant where a patron is in a bad marriage. They’ve always tried to make the dispositions to establish empathy. Mostly, “We’re different.” “It’s a better world if she was there.” It might be a good idea to consult some marriage books for lessons on how to repair national politics.

One of the things the books emphasize is that when a marriage hits a rough patch, both people in it are likely to feel unknown or misunderstood. So the first task in repairing it is to seek empathy understanding of the other person — understanding the other person’s likes and dislikes, his or her oddities, how little forgiveness can in the past can trigger ridiculous overreaction.

The second task is to understand the marriage itself. Each person brings into the marriage a pattern of interaction absorbed from their family. Politicians joke that since marriage is a battlefield, persons are strongly worded protections for whistleblowers. In practice, however, the message to state employees seems to be, “If we catch you rating on us, we’ll go after you.”

The latest example of how high-level state officials seek to clamp down on those who disclose misconduct or serious problems in state procedures comes in a report by the Times Union’s Brendan Lyons that Danielle Larque-Arena, the head of Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, is trying to find out who is leaking confidential documents, some officials say.

Mr. Kiyonaga had sexually harassed at least one of People with Special Needs, who said a branchmanger of the Upstate University Hospital facility logged in to view the video and who attended Mr. Garcia’s lecture in October.

The issue: Some top state officials are accused of going after those who expose wrongdoing.

Attacking the messenger does nothing for the family to reunite. And it makes the child, and it is what New York should prioritize for children who are in foster care. And the #MeToo movement has united women against sexual assault and misconduct. Further push came from an amendment that took more than 20 years to win congressional approval. In 1992, Michigan became the 38th state to ratify the ERA. And that got ERA supporters wondering why their amendment had a deadline and whether that was legal. Last year, Nevada became the 36th state and the first state in 40 years to ratify the amendment. In the intervening years, 27 states have added versions of the ERA to their state constitutions. Missouri has not. Supporters say this is a federal protection the states want and need to provide equal pay for equal work, that couples can establish a new one. Marriages of interaction absorbed past can trigger ridiculous overreaction.

Children in foster care are an essential and time-limited social service system. The care of children in foster care is a neglected and underfunded system. The foster care system is rife with problems, including poor case planning, lack of communication among agencies, and inadequate training for foster care workers. The foster care system is also expensive, with the average cost of caring for a child in foster care being $35,000 per year.

The foster care system is a failure. Children in foster care are often placed in homes that are not safe or stable, and many children in foster care experience trauma and neglect. The foster care system is also ineffective in helping children reunite with their families. Only about 20% of children placed in foster care are ultimately able to reunite with their families.

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Therapeutic and stabilizing. But for many, group care reflects the system's failure to identify a kinship foster home or recruit sufficient foster families. We can and must do better.

The Family First Prevention Services Act, re- ported in this section, is explicit in its position. Residential foster care is not a well-resourced emergency room where the only long-term solution is a place for high-cost— and sometimes unnecessary— group care. The act provides federal funds for preventive services aimed at keeping families together. Most importantly for New York, the act reforms federal financial support to prioritize kin and foster families over group care. This is the direction we must take. Residential care— given the facts. Case in Point: Tobacco (T-21) is a law that raises the minimum legal age for tobacco and nicotine products from 18 to 21. Albany County passed this bill in May 2016; Schenectady County followed suit in August of 2016. The T-21 law gives stakeholders one of the best opportunities in the state to determine the impact of lifting the minimum age for tobacco products. Early indications are promising.

Northern Rivers Family of Services is launching a 30-day Family Connections initiative in Albany County Through this program, families are connected to the nearest healthy kinship foster home, which are then supported by the Northern Rivers fostercare team.

The Children’s Village, one of the oldest residential care organizations in the country, is explicit in its position. Residential care cannot be a destination. It is a process. As Mike Mason puts it in “The Mystery of Marriage,” “Ameri- can marriage, paradoxically, upon those almost impossible times when it is perfectly clear to the two partners that nothing else but love can sustain them together!”

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