

COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT MATTER IN THE NORTHWEST

## Is it Bruce Almighty to the rescue?

Dr. Bruce Goldberg has the ability, but the job is daunting and often thankless



THOMAS BOYD/THE OREGONIAN

**"Bruce Goldberg is a gift to Oregon, the best any of us advocates for the disadvantaged ever could have hoped for. He's a remarkable observer and listener and believer in holistic medicine, always interested in the whole person."**

**ELLEN LOWE,**  
lobbyist for the  
Oregon Law Center

**N**ov. 1, 2005, is a day Bruce Goldberg recalls with unusual clarity.

The news that morning was dominated by reaction to the death of Rosa Parks and President Bush's nomination of Samuel Alito to the U.S. Supreme Court. What Goldberg vividly remembers about that day, however, is his elation at the phone call that changed his life.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski wanted the highly respected physician to give up his role as administrator of the Office for Oregon Health Policy and Research. Instead, the governor wanted him to take on the toughest challenge in Oregon government: leading and transforming the state's massive, mismanaged Department of Human Services.

It was a job that seemingly chewed people up, churning through five leadership changes in the previous five years. The headaches awaiting the department's next leader were nothing short of staggering:

A huge mental health crisis.

Half a million Oregonians without health care.

A lack of sufficient investment. A crumbling public health infrastructure.

A total loss of legislators' confidence. And a battered public image, which had been worsened by recent reports of a young girl found starving and unconscious in a state foster home.

Almost any rational person would have wanted some time to think over such an offer. Not Goldberg.

"It was a phenomenal opportunity," the 52-year-old New York native said in an interview last week. "It was a chance to do what I've always done, which is to help improve the lives of our most vulnerable populations. That's always been my passion."

Goldberg said he hasn't had a single second thought about taking the job, despite recent federal reports condemning the state's foster care program and poor treatment of psychiatric patients at the Oregon State Hospital. His department has come under blistering fire in legislative hearings this month, yet the mild-mannered doctor appears surprisingly upbeat and confident things are heading in exactly the right direction.

Perhaps it's because he's a man with a plan.

"We're embarking on a large endeavor to focus on how to become more efficient and more effective," he said. "This is about becoming the best, becoming a world-class human services organization."



DOUG BATES

To get there, Goldberg has embraced what the corporate world knows as the "lean management" concept that has helped make Toyota so successful. He was introduced to it by an unlikely ally, John Ramsey, a former Lockheed Martin vice president with vast experience in improving company performance.

"Bruce is a difference-maker," said Ramsey. "I think he's Oregon's hope."

Ramsey, 69, retired to Ashland a few years ago after a 32-year career in which he led the aerospace giant's push to change company culture and implement change. One of his new neighbors in Oregon, Sen. Alan Bates, D-Ashland, introduced him to Goldberg, who quickly recognized Ramsey as a valuable resource.

"Here's a guy who spent his entire career helping the aerospace industry become more efficient and effective," Goldberg said. "He believes, like I do, in government's ability to improve lives, and he's willing to help as an unpaid seven-figure consultant."

You won't hear about it on the 6 o'clock news, but the unusual collaboration has already started to show results. It led Goldberg to create the position of chief financial officer and fill it with accounting whiz Jim Scherzinger, former CFO and superintendent of the Portland School District.

"Jim has turned our fiscal infrastructure around," Goldberg said. "We got rid of our deficit. We manage our finances significantly better."

Influenced by Ramsey, Goldberg isn't much interested in drawing new organizational charts. The 10,000-employee department has been reorganized over and over since its creation in 1977, and both men believe this has contributed to disarray and weak performance.

Some Salem lawmakers wonder whether consolidating all of the state's human services into one huge bureaucracy three decades ago was a mistake. Is the department too big?

"We're still asking the same question, and I think it's the wrong question," Goldberg said. "It's not how you draw the boxes on the chart; it's actually how you get the work done."

Now Goldberg, with the help of Ramsey and a cadre of energized believers, is well into the six-month first phase of a project aimed at transforming the department. They're pursuing it with guidance and resources provided under a \$3.2 million contract with California-based McKinsey & Company, an elite consulting group that accepted the Oregon project only because of Ramsey's excellent connections.

"This first phase will create baselines, benchmarks and a plan," Ramsey said. "The second phase, which begins this summer, is the hard one — implementing the plan and changing the culture."

The project's mission, he said, is not to help Goldberg's department "do the job cheaper," although that's a welcome side benefit. The aim is to do the job better.

"When we started out on this, it was like a 1,000-foot putt," Ramsey said. "Now it's more like a 200-foot putt."

As any golfer knows, that's still an impossibly long one.

"What we need now is a whole lot more Bruce Goldbergs in that department, a whole lot more leaders," Ramsey said. "They give us a chance to make this putt."

**MARGARET CARTER,**  
state senator from Portland:

"Besides having a deep background as a provider in nurturing and caring for people, he understands that patient care is a management system. In my 24 years in the Legislature, I can't think of a more powerful leader than Bruce Goldberg."

**ARTHUR TOWERS,**  
political director for SEIU  
Local 503:

"Bruce is an extraordinary advocate for clients of DHS services. He's a true believer, willing to go to bat for the most vulnerable among us. Our organization also really appreciates his understanding of the perspective of the frontline social workers providing these services."

**CATHY KAUFMANN,**  
co-chairwoman of the  
Human Services  
Coalition of Oregon:

"We all have a very high opinion of Bruce, and that historically has not been the typical feeling between advocates and DHS directors. I actually have some hope that he can turn the department around. He is well-served by his very personal passion and commitment and a real curiosity about what's working and what isn't."