



ADVOCACY ALERT



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Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force

Economic inequality reemerges, opportunity withers

Guest column by Juan Carlos Ordóñez, the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

This political campaign season has witnessed vigorous debate on whether to make permanent tax cuts favoring the richest Americans. At long last, the spotlight has begun to shine on the resurgence of economic inequality, which is undermining the country's promise of being a land of opportunity.

Income inequality has been rising in the U.S. almost without interruption for the better part of three decades, returning to levels not seen since before the Great Depression. In the 1970s, the wealthiest 1 percent of American families collected a combined 9 percent of the nation's income. By 2005, the take of

the wealthiest 1 percent had skyrocketed to 22 percent of all income.

Today, the nation's top 1 percent has an estimated yearly average income of \$1.5 million each. Just to get into this elite group requires a yearly income greater than \$466,000.

The rising tide that used to lift all boats is no more. In today's economy, only the largest yachts rise, while the rest are left behind.

Oregon's experience illustrates the point. From the late 1970s to 2005 the wealthiest 1 percent of Oregon families saw their income almost triple after adjusting for inflation. The typical family, on the other hand, saw virtually no change over the three decades. More recently, from

2002 to 2005, nearly all (97 percent) of Oregon income gains went to the richest 1 percent.

The degree of inequality is more pronounced when it comes to wealth — the ownership of assets. One recent study reported that the wealthiest 1 percent of American families own half the country's financial assets, such as stocks and bonds.

Deliberate policy choices have, in large measure, enabled the concentration in wealth and income. Key among them has been the drive to cut taxes on the wealthy and corporations, on the theory that it would generate wealth that would trickle down. But instead, the money has gushed upward.

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Upcoming changes to WIC food package

In 2003, USDA began a process to update the WIC food package, which lists items that may be purchased with WIC vouchers. This is the first major revision since 1974.

In Oregon, about 106,000 women, infants and children benefit from the WIC program each month. WIC vouchers provide an average of \$54 in nutritious foods to each participant

monthly. These foods play an important role in increasing the nutritional intake of WIC households, helping to reduce the incidence of low birth weight and anemia, and helping to protect children from behavioral and cognitive deficiencies. Additionally, WIC dollars strengthen Oregon's local economies. In 2007, WIC brought more than \$77.5 million into Oregon's economy.

After a lengthy public input process the U.S. Department of Agriculture released an interim final rule in December 2007 that will revise and update the WIC food package. The revisions largely reflect recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies in its report, WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change.

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take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Picture in your mind thousands of voters who care deeply about eliminating hunger, and imagine the impact this voting block would have.

Take five minutes this month and find another person who cares about hunger issues and encourage that person to register to vote. And if you've moved, changed your name, or want to switch to a new political party you need to re-register.

To vote in Oregon's primary election on May 20, 2008 you need to register by April 29.

In Oregon you can register to vote if you're a resident of the state, a citizen of the United States, and are at least 17 years old. If you're 17, you won't receive a ballot until an election on or after your 18th birthday.

More information about voter registration, including a downloadable Oregon voter registration form, is available at the Oregon secretary of state's Web site, www.sos.state.or.us/elections/votereg.

Five minutes, one new voter. Voting blocks grow to be thousands of voters strong when built by many hands.

Income inequality has been rising

(cont. from page 1)

Changes to the tax structure have delivered a one-two punch that has staggered the middle class. With the wealthy and corporations no longer contributing their fair share, the public structures that foster opportunity — the education system and the Oregon Health Plan, for instance — have fallen into disrepair. And to maintain public structures even in their weakened state, the burden has increasingly shifted to the middle class and the poor.

If the middle class is on its knees, the poor remain flat on their backs or worse. The percentage of the population who are poor is the same as in 1980. Given Oregon's

population growth since, today there are more poor Oregonians than ever before. Moreover, since 1980, the share of Oregon's working families with children who are poor despite their work effort has doubled.

The federal definition of poverty, however, masks the true extent of the problem. Economists generally agree that the federal definition is outdated, failing to take into account housing, transportation, health care, child care and other costs that make up an increasing share of a family's budget. The federal poverty line currently defines as poor a family of four making \$21,200 a year or less. In reality, however, a

family of four in Oregon would need at least twice that amount to make ends meet, several studies have noted.

No wonder, then, that opportunity has withered. In the U.S. today, only six out of every 100 children born to families in the bottom fifth in terms of income rise to the top fifth over the course of their life, according to a recent report by the Economic Mobility Project, a collaboration of four think tanks from across the political spectrum. "The 'rags to riches' story," the report concludes, "is much more common in Hollywood than on Main Street." Reawakening opportunity

The Advocacy Alert is published jointly by Oregon Food Bank (OFB) and the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF).

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on Main Street America requires tackling inequality head on. And at minimum, that means restoring balance to our tax structure and reinvesting in our public structures.

WIC changes (cont. from page 1)

The proposal includes many significant changes.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

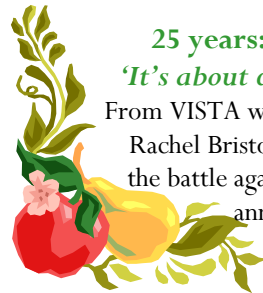
- ◆ Fresh, processed or combined fruits and vegetables for children and women;
- ◆ Baby foods including meats for fully breast-fed infants, and fruits and vegetables for all infants 6-11 months of age;
- ◆ Whole wheat bread or other whole grain options.

State WIC programs will also have the option of offering:

- ◆ Alternatives to milk, including calcium-set tofu, and calcium and vitamin D-rich soy beverage;
- ◆ Canned or dried legumes, and canned beans or peas as an alternative to dried legumes.

REDUCED ITEMS:

- ◆ Infant formula for partially breast-fed infants and for fully formula-fed infants 6-11 months;
- ◆ The quantity of eggs;
- ◆ Milk for children and women;



25 years: Rachel Bristol leads battle against hunger

'It's about community. It's about caring for your neighbors.'

From VISTA worker to executive director and CEO, Oregon Food Bank's Rachel Bristol has dedicated her entire career — all 25 years — to leading the battle against hunger and its root causes. We celebrate Rachel's 25th anniversary with Oregon Food Bank and wish her many more.

- ◆ Cheese for children and women;
- ◆ Juice for children and women.

ELIMINATED ITEMS:

- ◆ Juice for all infants, substituting baby food with fruits and vegetables; and
- ◆ Whole milk for participants age 2 and older, substituting low-fat milk.

The addition of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are designed to strengthen WIC's role in reducing obesity and improving nutrition to help vulnerable children form healthy eating habits at an early age.

State agencies must implement the new provisions no later than August 5, 2009. For more information contact Karen Bettin, MS, RD at 971-673-0044.

SAVE THE DATE
THURSDAY, APRIL 24
at 7:30 p.m.

A presentation by Ken Meter
at the First Congregational
Church of Christ
1126 SW Park Ave., Portland

"The Future of Food in Oregon"

Meter will present a picture of the food system in the Northwest to inspire people to take action to improve it.

