



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

February 2004
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take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

OFB urges a 'Yes' vote on Measure 30.

Message:

Tuesday February 3 is the deadline for turning in your ballot.

A 'Yes' vote means:

- 88,000 Oregonians will retain health care coverage
- Over 125,000 Oregonians will continue to receive important medical services
- Oregon's budget will be balanced, protecting health, education, and human services for elders, children, and Oregon families.
- Certainty and stability for our economy.

Legislative Yellow Pages

State Legislative Information
1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem)
(503) 986-1000 (in Salem)
www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide

Federal Legislative Contacts
Rep. Wu (District 1)
(503) 326-2901
Rep. Walden (District 2)
(541) 776-4646
Rep. Blumenauer (District 3)
(503) 231-2300
Rep. DeFazio (District 4)
(541) 465-6732
Rep. Hooley (District 5)
(503) 588-9100
Senator Smith
(503) 326-3386
Senator Wyden
(503) 326-7525

Seeking common ground for long-term tax reform

If the debate surrounding Measure 30 has taught us anything it's that there is little agreement about *how* to fix Oregon's budget crisis. However, despite the apparent lack of consensus on the question of how, most Oregonians do agree that there are fundamental problems with our tax and budget system. As we begin the arduous task of addressing long-term tax reform, we must begin by searching out the common ground that exists.

Common Ground #1 – We want reform

Yes, there is a problem and yes, we should work to address that problem. The legislative joint interim

committee on tax reform has only had a few meetings and already there is speculation that legislators will determine voters cannot agree on any specific proposal so efforts to craft legislative reforms to our current revenue system will fall by the wayside. The popularity of this perspective will only increase should voters reject Measure 30. However, every effort should be made to make a distinction between desire for reform and consensus on specific proposals. Economic forecasts predict that without reform, Oregon's budget crisis will continue beyond the current biennium. According to analysis by Oregon Cen-

ter for Public Policy, inflation-adjusted per capita General Fund revenue will not return to 1999-01 levels until after 2007-09. In other words, we will not have the money available to fund state services such as education, health care, or public safety, at the level we relied upon prior to the 2001 economic recession for another five years unless we make some changes. In order to avoid five years of uncertainty and crisis for our state's economy, we must take the important first step of communicating to our elected officials that ignoring the problem is not a solution – we want reform.

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Reauthorization, reauthorization.... When will it end?

Congress adjourned for winter break leaving two issues important to anti-poverty advocates unresolved – TANF and Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Members returned on January 20th to complete final months of the 108th Congress. Although the timeline for reauthorization of those two bills remains uncertain some action is expected on the Child Nutrition bill.

Reauthorization is the process of reviewing federally funded programs, usually every five years.

Issues up for debate include funding levels and program rules.

Welfare Reauthorization
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF, is the federally funded cash assistance program designed to alleviate the effects of poverty on the lowest income families. Reauthorization has been under debate since 2002.

TANF Reauthorization may get delayed again because there are some sticky election year issues. The debate is currently in the

Senate. We need to continue to communicate our priorities and concerns with Senators Smith and Wyden. These include increased funding for child care, realistic goals and support for work participation, and rejection of "superwaiver" proposals. Oregon has an additional worry—our waiver has run out and we need language in the reauthorization bill to allow us to continue some of the most successful practices. We also hope to implement our "Parents as Scholars" state legislation to allow 1% of TANF

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Seeking common ground for long term tax reform *(continued from page 1)*

Common Ground #2 – Government provides valuable services

Most taxpayers agree that state and local government provides valuable services to citizens and businesses. However, there is a disconnect between support for government and taxes in general and support for specific programs. When asked, citizens consistently affirm their support for increased public spending on basic services such as education, health care, human services and programs aimed at improving quality of life measures. Support drops considerably when voters are asked if they support increased taxes. In

other words, the view that citizens resent government and support policies to shrink the role of government does not hold true for most Americans when the question is framed around specific programs versus taxes or government in general. We must work together to advance the positive notion that Oregonians support government services and programs. Everyone from individual taxpayers to the collective voice of the public interest community must begin to shift the debate toward the proactive, positive vision of the role of government. The initial steps may be nothing more than collect-

ing and retelling stories of how our lives have been enhanced through government programs and the vital role government plays in our society. Charitable organizations provide invaluable services. However, two important factors supplement this story. First we must educate the public that government funding is the lifeline for many of our favorite charitable organizations. And second is the limit to the capacity of the non-profit community to absorb the ever growing demand for services.

Common Ground #3 – Citizen involvement is a key element

Oregon's history with the citizen initiative process exemplifies the role non-elected citizens play in our civic process. Unfortunately, the complexity of tax and budget issues too often keeps people from engaging in policy debates. However, debate about revenue reform need not begin with specific policy details. We can and should begin with a basic discussion of values. We must search out common ground on basic principles of fairness, stability, and adequacy. Opportunities for these discussions exist at the micro level of friends and family to the macro level of public testimony at legislative hearings.

Reauthorization, reauthorization.... When will it end? *(continued from page 1)*

clients to earn a two-or four-year degree while on assistance.

Child Nutrition Programs

Child Nutrition reauthorization is more likely to occur this year. Temporary

funding expires March 31 and politically it is a good election year issue. Here our priorities and concerns include whether new money will be available for positive improvements and program expansion versus the

Administration's desire to tighten income verification in the school meals programs.

Now is the time to contact Oregon's Budget Committee members, Congress-

woman Hooley and Senator Wyden, to encourage that an additional \$1 billion per year be added to child nutrition reauthorization. It is also important to contact your members and urge them to support the priorities outlined for TANF.

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

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Who's talking tax reform: Where to find information

Citizens for Oregon's Future, a non-partisan, non-profit organization offers free training workshops covering Oregon's revenue history and options for reform. Visit their web site www.fororegon.org or call 503-232-8808 for a schedule.

Oregon Center for Public Policy, a non-profit research institute based in Silverton, OR. Visit their web site <http://www.ocpp.org/> or call 503-873-1201 for more copies of their latest reports.

Oregon legislators on the Joint Interim Committee on Tax Reform will be holding meetings in Salem and in communities throughout Oregon over the next several months. Legislators will then convene for a special session on Tax Reform in June 2004. Visit their web site www.leg.state.or.us or call 503-986-1266 for a listing of meeting times and locations.

Oregon State University Extension Service recently released "Seven Frequently Asked Questions about Taxes and Spending in Oregon". Visit <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/index.php> to view the fact sheets.