



take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

Contact your members of Congress and encourage them to support a clean version of the Fair Minimum Wage Act. The act will raise the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 by spring 2009. A “clean” bill indicates that there are no amendments attached.

Message:

- ✓ The federal minimum wage has remained unchanged for nine years while over the same time the cost of living has increased 26%.
- ✓ A worker supporting a family of four at federal minimum wage earns barely over half of the federal poverty threshold of \$20,000.
- ✓ Passage of a clean bill sends a strong signal to workers that their hard work and responsibility will be rewarded with a fair wage.

www.oregonfoodbank.org
ADVOCATE

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
Senator Smith
(503) 326-3386
Senator Wyden
(503) 326-7525
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

Thank you Gov. Kulongoski

Governor Ted Kulongoski recently included a significant increase in the state appropriation for the Oregon Food Bank Network in his proposed 2007 budget. On behalf of the network, we would like to thank Governor Kulongoski for his continued strong support. His leadership on the issue has been instrumental

in the network’s efforts to end hunger and its root causes.

The governor’s proposed budget includes \$2 million for the Oregon Food Bank Network—an increase of approximately \$1.2 million for the biennium. The additional funds will allow the 20 regional food banks

that make up the network to leverage local community support and increase distribution of high-quality fresh and frozen food. Last year the network handled 57.9 million pounds of food—providing approximately 755,000 emergency food boxes and four million prepared meals.

What’s on our plate — hopefully food

Everyone deserves to eat and together we can prevent hunger. The Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force (OHRTF) invites you to join us in pursuing the following items during the 2007 legislative session.

Hardworking Oregonians should be able to afford a home, but for many this is not the case. Oregonians can help address critical housing needs by supporting the Housing Alliance in raising \$100 million for affordable housing.

Some Oregonians are unable to work because of a disabling illness or injury. Unfortunately, many have no means of support while they apply for federal benefits which can take 1-3 years. We can support disabled Oregonians while they apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) by creating an SSI/SSDI bridge program for individuals.

Families with children sometimes needs a helping hand. The TANF program (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) was designed to provide this support. However, recent changes on the federal level are presenting challenges. Join us in supporting policy packages for TANF that both address the federal requirements and help families succeed.

Access to health care is important for children to be healthy and ready to learn. Support the Healthy Kids Plan that expands health-care coverage to every child in Oregon so our children are able to thrive.

All Oregonians need protection against unjust lending practices, particularly those that result in fees higher than 300% APR. Oregon can ensure their protection by instituting a 36% interest cap on all consumer loans.

Oregonians earning wages below the federal poverty

level should not have to pay taxes. We can help low-wage workers by expanding the Refundable Earned Income Tax Credit to 12%.

Our statewide food system is important for ensuring all Oregonians have access to safe, nutritious food while also supporting our local food producers, distributors and retailers. A statute creating a State Food Policy Council will provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure food system health.

Fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables support good health for senior citizens and families with small children. We can provide more access to healthy foods, and help Oregon farmers, by expanding the WIC and Senior Farmers’ Market Coupon programs.

Everyone needs a safety net to catch them when times are tough. For many

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Food programs and farm bill highlight OFB agenda

On December 6, the Oregon Food Bank Board of Directors approved 2007 advocacy goals. Because the Oregon Legislature doesn't begin until January 8, 2007, the goals are currently broad. They will become more focused as we progress into the legislative calendar.

At the state level, priorities include support for food programs such as WIC, summer food, and farmers' market coupon programs; and family economic security programs including Temporary Aid to Needy Families, Earned Income Tax Credit, housing, energy assistance, and health care. OFB will also continue to be active in the fight to control the unfair interest rates and practices of the payday loan industry.

OFB and OHRTF also will focus on several federal issues. The 2007 farm bill reauthorization will be a primary concern. The Novem-

ber national election could have a dramatic impact on the bill. With Democrats taking the majority in the House and Senate, there will be new chairmen of the Agriculture Committees. Rep. Collin Peterson of Minnesota and Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa have both pledged to write a new farm bill next year. Available federal dollars will significantly impact farm bill outcomes.

A strengthened food stamp piece of the next farm bill could make a significant contribution toward the fight against hunger. In 2005, an estimated 425,000 Oregonians utilized food stamps each month—infusing the Oregon economy with more than \$450 million federal food stamp dollars. Food stamps are a highly effective way to help people access nutritious foods because they can be used at most

grocery stores. Food stamps also grant users the choice of what foods to purchase—allowing them to meet cultural and dietary needs. OFB will seek to increase monthly food stamp benefits, support outreach efforts, and remove arbitrary barriers to eligibility.

The federal minimum wage will be another key area (see this month's *Take Five*). OFB and OHRTF support Senator Kennedy's Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage in three increments over two years up to \$7.25 per hour by the spring of 2009. While the Oregon minimum wage stands at a higher rate than the federal, we stand in solidarity with food banks across the country that recognize how hardworking families would benefit from an increase in the federal minimum wage.

While Congress has not raised the minimum wage since 1997, the cost of living has increased 26%. Those who live on low incomes have to limit their food budget—too often forcing them to go hungry. A person working full time while earning federal minimum wage makes only \$10,700 a year. For a family of four, this is barely over half of the federal poverty threshold of \$20,000. An increase in the minimum wage would directly benefit 5.6 million people, while another 8.3 million low-paid workers would also have their wages increased because many employers pay market-driven wages above the minimum. A fair increase from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour would provide a full-time employee \$4,370 more each year—enough for a year's groceries.

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

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What's on our plate *(continued from page 1)*

Oregonians a food box prevents their families from going hungry. An increase in funds for the Oregon Food Bank Statewide Network will bolster the emergency food distribution system and ensure a safety net for Oregonians.

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Is it 1984?

In November, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its annual analysis of Census Bureau survey results for 2005. Nationally, more than 35 million people—including 12.4 million children—were still living in households that were “food insecure”—or, not able to afford the food they need.

In Oregon, approximately 4.3 million people were food insecure, a small improvement from the last period covered by the survey results, 2000-2002.

While we are pleased to see that Oregon's rates decreased, we are disturbed that the USDA made technical changes in the terms used. However, in a Orwellian twist, the term “food insecure with hunger” was changed to “very low food security.” While the new phrase may be more scientifically accurate, we feel it glosses over a significant social problem and belittles the challenges faced by those who are hungry.