



ADVOCACY ALERT



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Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Hunger Task Force

Recession ‘officially’ ending but Oregonians get no relief

According to the state economist, Tom Potiowsky, Oregon’s recession is (nearly) over. Last month the state Legislative Revenue Office presented its quarterly reports to the Legislature. These reports are used as the basis for budgeting state government.

While the revenue projections were relatively flat (meaning they did not increase or decrease significantly since the last forecast), job losses were projected to continue well into next year putting further strain on human services and social safety nets. Overall, the latest forecast projected a loss of about \$43 million out of a \$13.4 billion state budget.

“The reality is that revenues are meeting our rather dismal expectations,” said another economist Josh Harwood. No economist needs to

tell the hundreds of thousands of Oregonians out of work and struggling to put food on the table, however, that rough times are still ahead.

Last spring, during the worst economic recession since 1929-32, Oregon was faced with a \$4 billion deficit and dramatic increases in demand for state services. In response, the Legislature enacted \$2 billion in cuts, drew down federal stimulus dollars to protect vital programs and passed two new tax measures on the state’s highest income earners and corporations. Jointly, the measures are expected to raise \$733 million in General Fund revenue during the current two-year budget cycle. The 2009-11 state budget was built with the expectation of these funds.

The tax package passed by the Legislature was referred to voters; this January, Oregonians will vote on ballot measures 66 and 67. A ‘yes’ vote will pro-

tect vital services to struggling Oregonians by enacting a new tax bracket on Oregon’s highest income earners and corporations. A ‘no’ vote will cut the state budget by nearly \$1 billion.

In preparation for the possibility that the ballot referrals fail, every state agency was required to submit cuts of up to 10 percent of their budgets. Several programs that Oregon Food Bank and the Oregon Hunger Task-force advocate for were included in these cuts such as TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), ERDC (Employment Related Day Care), dental care for low-income people, and health coverage for some seniors and people with disabilities.

Next month we will have more information on each of the ballot measures. We urge you to read up on the measures, register, and vote this January.

take five
(actions that take five minutes or less)

Educate yourself about two important measures in preparation of voting in the special election on January 26, 2010.

Action:

Information about Measures 66 and 67 is at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/comm/lro/>.

More information about voter registration, including a downloadable Oregon voter registration form is available at the Oregon secretary of state’s Web site, <http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/other.info/vr.htm>.

Take five minutes and find another person who cares about hunger issues and encourage that person to register to vote. If you have moved or changed your name you must re-register. To vote in the January 26 special election, you need to register by January 5.

The Oregon Votes toll free information line is 1 866 ORE VOTE / 673 8683 is for all Oregon voters.



Change is coming ...

to the Advocacy Alert newsletter. Starting in January 2010 the Advocacy Alert will be issued quarterly rather than monthly, with Action Alerts in-between. We will keep you posted and welcome any recommendations you may have. Please email Lori at lvaldez@oregonfoodbank.org or call 503-282-0555 Ext. 246.

New USDA report confirms escalating hunger crisis in Oregon—Oregon ranks second in hunger

Oregon's hunger rate is, once again, on the rise.

The newest report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, issued on Nov. 16, indicates that both the rates of food insecurity and hunger continue to increase in Oregon, according to Oregon Food Bank (OFB) and the Oregon Hunger Task Force (OHTF).

An average of 6.6 percent of Oregon households (about 95,000 households per year), between January 2006 and December 2008, experienced times when they were hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. That compares to 3.9 percent in 2003-05 – a statistically significant 2.7 percent increase. These households fall into a group technically called “very low food security,” but better known as “hunger.” These households ate less, skipped meals or sometimes went without food for whole days.

Oregon is now among the five states with the highest hunger rate, in the company of Mississippi, Maine,

Oklahoma and Missouri. Only Mississippi, at 7.4 percent, had a higher percentage than Oregon of hunger.

A larger group, 13.1 percent of Oregon households experienced food insecurity, meaning that these households lack consistent access to adequate amounts of nutritious food. That compares to 11.9 percent during the 2003-05 period – a 1.2 percent increase.

Nationally, 49-million Americans, including nearly 17-million children, lived in households that were food insecure in 2008 – up from 36.2 million in 2007 and 33.2 million in 2000.

Oregon's rates of both hunger and food insecurity increased significantly since last year's report. “These alarming numbers confirm the severe human toll of this recession and what the OFB Network has been seeing for the past two years,” said Rachel Bristol, CEO, Oregon Food Bank. “Oregon has been hit especially hard.”

Distribution of emergency food boxes throughout the OFB Network increased 14 percent – from 786,000 to 897,000 -- during fiscal year 2008-09, according to Bristol. In many parts of the state, emergency food distribution increased more than 20 percent. And 36 percent of those eating meals from emergency food boxes are children.

“Oregon's rise in hunger mirrors Oregon's rise in unemployment,” according to Patti Whitney-Wise, executive director, Oregon Hunger Task Force. “While we are boosting programs and emergency food efforts, wages aren't keeping up with family needs. We need long-term solutions to help families get ahead.”

It is important to note that the USDA numbers reflect the state of hunger in 2008. Since then, the economy has weakened significantly, and there are likely many more people struggling with hunger than this report states.

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

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Legislative Yellow Pages

State Legislative Information

1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem) 503-986-1000 (in Salem)

<http://www.leg.state.or.us/citizenguide/>

Federal Legislative Contacts

Senator Merkley (503)326-3386
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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. Schrader (District 5) (503) 588-9100

Do you know a child who needs health insurance?

A new program called Healthy Kids will provide every Oregon child access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. Depending on a family's income, children may be eligible for free or low-cost health insurance that covers all health needs, including doctor visits, dental care, vision, mental or behavioral health services, medicines and more. The Healthy Kids application and more information are available on the Web site <http://www.healthykids.gov/> or by calling 1-877-314-5678.