



Advocacy Alert

OREGON FOOD BANK
OREGON HUNGER RELIEF TASK FORCE

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take five

(actions that take five minutes or less)

Action:

This month while legislators are preparing for the upcoming session, *take five* to add another voice to our fight against hunger and its root causes. Invite a friend, family member, or coworker to receive the monthly *Advocacy Alert*.

Three ways to get someone on the list:

1. Send an email to: advocacy@oregonfoodbank.org include a name, mailing address and email address.
2. Sign up on-line from www.oregonfoodbank.org, follow the link to 'Advocate' and 'Advocacy Alert'.
3. Call 503-282-0555 x 200.

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

More voices join the fight against hunger in Oregon

On November 12th, Oregon Food Bank hosted a workshop on the medical and social impacts of childhood hunger, specifically targeted to health care professionals. OFB received co-sponsorship support from Providence Health System, OHSU, and Children First for Oregon. Over 50 members of the health care community, including doctors, school nurses, nurse practitioners, dietitians, social workers and advocates, spent an entire day examining the medical and social costs of hunger in children. They finished the day by brainstorming ways the health care community could become more involved in finding solutions to the problem.

Dr. Larry Brown, Distinguished Scientist and director of the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University delivered the keynote address. Dr. Brown is recognized as one of the foremost experts on the social costs of hunger. He chaired the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America, which performed field investigations in half the states in the nation during the 1980s. Following is an excerpt from his keynote speech, which focuses on the connection between public policy and hunger. To access the complete speech, see www.oregonfoodbank.org.

Excerpt from Dr. Larry Brown's speech:

So how then are we to understand the existence of 35 million people without enough to eat? For this, we must evaluate the factors that comprise the concept of social injustice: the economy, wages, poverty and public policy. Virtually all hunger, all food deprivation and all adverse health consequences associated with not having enough to eat, are the direct result of policy decisions and other forms of governmental inaction.

To see the impact of human hands in creating food deprivation in our nation, let us return to the era... when hunger returned to

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Hunger rate improves while remaining above the national average

A week before Thanksgiving, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the most recent findings from the US Census survey of hunger and food insecurity. The report, an annual supplement to the Current Population Survey, reveals another increase in the number of Americans living in food insecure households. Nationally 36.3 million Americans, including 13.3 million children, lived in food insecure households in 2003. This number also includes 9.6 million Americans who experienced outright hunger.

According to the USDA definition, a household is food insecure if it is "uncertain of having, or being able to acquire, enough food to meet basic needs of all household members because of insufficient money and other resources for food." Hunger occurs when an individual unwillingly goes without food because of insufficient money or other resources for food.

The report also includes a three-year average of food insecurity and hunger rates for every state. The state report reveals that Ore-

gon's hunger rate has improved since the first state survey covering the three-year period of 1996-98. During the most recent period covering 2001-03, 12.9 percent of Oregon households were food insecure and 4.3 percent included someone who went hungry in any given month during a year. This is an improvement over the 1996-98 period when 6 percent of Oregon households included a person who went hungry. However, Oregon still remains above the national average of 3.4 percent.

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Medical community joins the fight against hunger *(continued from page 1)*

America. Throughout much of the 1970s domestic hunger seemed under control but...it returned with a vengeance in the early 1980s. Within but a few years bread lines and soup kitchens in major cities went from but a handful in each place to 300, 400, even 500 in number. Clearly something quite abrupt had happened to cause this situation. Indeed it had. Toward the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, a national recession led to high unemployment and unusually high interest rates. Millions of people lost their jobs, thousands and thousands of farmers lost their livelihood, and many people once secure in their middle class existence went through unemployment due to down-sizing, only to re-enter the labor market with a much lower income. But while the recession was significant, it was not unprecedented; the nation had experienced some tough economic circumstances not too many

years before, but these times had not lead to the proliferation of bread lines and soup kitchens. The bread line phenomenon in the 1980s had not been seen since the Great Depression years of the 1930s. Something else was at work.

The return of hunger to the nation was ushered in not by the economy alone, but by new public policy that was adopted as more households were becoming economically vulnerable. Starting in 1982, The Reagan Administration submitted its first four-year budget for the period 1982-1985, the Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act. It was passed largely as submitted, by a Democratic Congress. This budget cut more than \$12 billion from the federal food program safety net that had been created during the late sixties and early seventies. Nearly \$8 billion was cut from the Food Stamp program, largely through reducing the allotment or

value of the stamps to an average of .72 cents per person per meal. Another \$4 billion was cut from the child nutrition programs like the school breakfast program.

So now we have an equation: more people jobless during a recession + the intentional weakening of federal programs to feed people during tough times = more bread lines and soup kitchens. And this is precisely what happened at the time. It is now well-established by a plethora of research over subsequent years. In short, human vulnerability is a fact of life because we cannot predict or control economies let alone the well-being of individual households. But what we can control is whether families are protected from the occasional vicissitudes of economic lurches. But when households are more vulnerable, and policymakers remove the supports that help them get by dur-

ing those times, something will happen. It is, as we have seen, an equation. Hunger was the inevitable product of political choices made at the time....

Social injustice in our nation has many children, but perhaps few are as troubling as hunger. Seven thousand years after the first cities were formed to protect the food security of existing populations, the wealthiest civilization in the history of the world somehow finds itself incapable of doing the same. But hunger, as we have seen, stems not from a shortage in the food supply, or from lack of capacity and know-how, but from structural inequalities built into our economy and social system. While it is possible to end hunger in America within a year by better utilizing the federal programs designed to feed those at risk, it also is possible to address the root causes of food insecurity by re-framing the nation's social contract.

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

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Oregon hunger rate above national average *(continued from page 1)*

Federal food programs play an important role in combating hunger and addressing food insecurity. During the period when Oregon's hunger rate has improved, we have also had impressive increases in the number of eligible people accessing food stamps. From June of 2000 to June of 2004 the number of people using food stamps in Oregon increased 80 percent. Nationally, 56 percent of food insecure households participated in one or more of the

three largest federal food programs. Those programs, National School Lunch, the Food Stamp Program, and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), are instrumental in protecting more families from hunger and food insecurity. However, funding increases are necessary for these programs to reach more people in need. For example, the minimum food stamp benefit has been frozen since 1977.

The significant cuts to Oregon Health Plan and other important work support programs such as child care are cause for concern. Improvements in food stamp participation and the increase in the number of people served through the emergency food system will not make up for the increasing costs of health care, child care, and housing. We must continue to work for improvements that will result in long term financial stability for the thousands of Oregon families who face hunger.