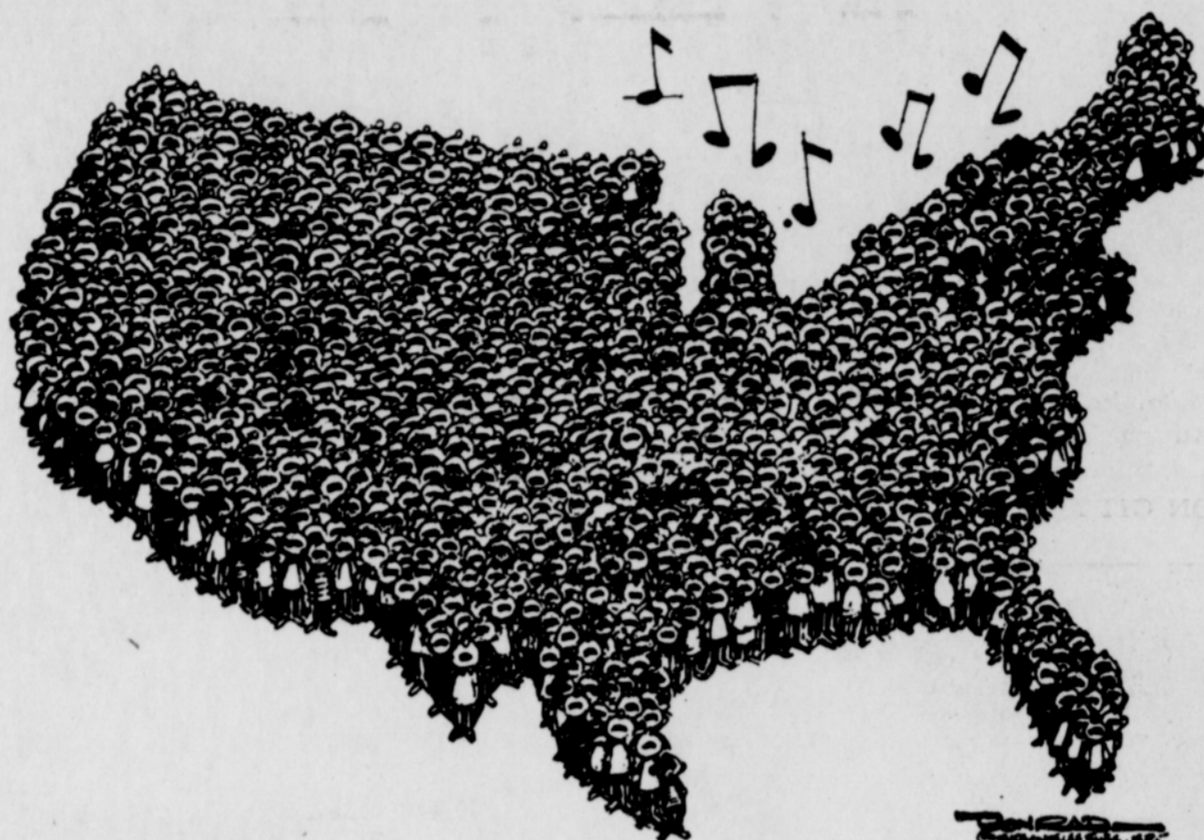




THE PUBLIC REPORT



Paul Conrad



"WE ARE THE POOR, WE ARE THE CHILDREN...!"

HOMELESS FUNDS DENIED

by William Newton

On April 29, 1985, Lawrence R. Craig, Director of the Community Services Program of the Oregon Department of Human Resources, sent a letter informing all community action agencies and state community services subgrantee organizations that the state legislature had, in legislative bills FY86 and FY87, authorized expenditure of one million dollars, with another million dollars in reserve, to be distributed next year "contingent on a Department of Resources report to the emergency board which documents program activities and the need for additional funds," to assist families and individuals in securing safe emergency shelter. Proposals were to be submitted by September 10, 1985. Successful proposals would be funded on October 1, 1985.

The letter and the request for proposals were received with appreciative hearts by the staff and volunteers at Clatsop Community Action, the Tillamook Community Action Council and the Community Action Team of Columbia. At last the state government had opened its eyes and seen the myriads of homeless in Oregon. Leviathan, aroused by the cries of the poverty stricken homeless in our state, belched out some money from deep within its bowels to assist them.

Community Action staff and volunteers from Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties began to move toward completing and submitting a proposal to establish emergency shelters on the northwest coast. There was much to be done and very little time before the September deadline.

All agencies and organizations that had any contact with the homeless were asked to cooperate in a united effort to coordinate all possible resources that could provide aid and shelter. A survey was taken to obtain the statistics necessary for an accurate needs assessment. The survey of twenty-two relevant agencies revealed that more than twenty-eight hundred homeless people had had contact with these agencies in the past year on the Northwest Coast. City and county endorsement was obtained — in short, each county and community where the shelters would be placed had to be organized in support of the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project.

By September 10, everything was done and the

proposal was submitted on time with full support from each county and all agencies involved with the state community services program.

On Friday, October 11, Dr. Charles Wilder, Director of Clatsop Community Action, was notified that the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project was among those recommended to the legislative committee for funding of \$33,000, which was \$24,000 short of the proposed need for \$57,000. On Monday, October 14, Dr. Wilder was told that the project would not be funded.

The following areas were granted funding: Washington County Community Action, \$66,403; Portland Community Action, \$567,819; Southwestern Oregon Community Action Committee, \$52,000; Community Services Consortium (Linn-Benton-Lincoln Counties), \$85,000; Umqua Community Action Network, \$37,341; Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, \$13,851; Blue Mountain Economic Development Council, \$4,248; Eastern Oregon Community Development Council, \$22,288; Community Health and Social Services of Lane County, \$131,000.

The proposals submitted on a competitive basis were interpreted according to a point value, 0 to 160. For example: "Describe your agency plans for coordinating program activities and provide copies of cooperative agreement with those agencies which document that coordination. Also describe how you would describe coordinate services funded through this proposal with your existing program operation. (20 points)" Nine questions were asked, each worth X-number of points. The proposal scoring was conducted by the State Community Services Program, and when all was said and done, the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project was rated in the top ten, and was tied in points with Lane County, which was awarded \$131,000.

Why was our project dropped? I asked Human Resources Director Lawrence Craig that question. "There is no adequate answer," he replied.

That answer is not an adequate answer. But so far it is the only answer given.

There is a discretionary fund which may yet come through with much needed money for the northwest coast, a last hope for state funding. If not, then once again the North Coast has been ignored.

For this there can be no justification "other than political expediency and the mistaken view that we on the North Coast are least able to stand up for our communities and citizenry," to quote a letter from Clatsop Community Action to Governor Victor Atiyeh following the rejection of our proposal.

Whether or not the allocation comes through, the problems of the homeless on the North

Coast remain. Almost three thousand people will be homeless on the North Coast this year, and there is no bright forecast for the future.

In fact the United Nations has declared 1987 as the "Year of the Homeless," and a possibility of recession in 1986 does not give much hope for improved lives for those victimized by economic depression, high unemployment, inflation, and all the other attendant causes of poverty on the North Coast. The prevalent cause of homelessness here is eviction which is due to inability to pay rent. If you cannot pay your rent on the North Coast you are in the street with no resources and no shelter because as of yet, there are none.

Those of us who have been working to develop shelter for the homeless on the North Coast, be they "burnouts," evictees, stranded or runaway youth or families unable to afford housing, will continue to work to relieve human suffering and to exercise our own humanity in the belief that no one in the United States should attempt to live without shelter, warmth, good clothing or food, especially on the Oregon North Coast in the midst of an ocean playground dotted with yachts, condominiums and other symbols of affluence. The winter of 1985-86 is fast approaching and now is the time that the homeless need the most assistance. Hopefully there are those on the North Coast who are able to help financially who will come forward and help. If not, then cold winter will take its toll on the homeless and will reflect the fact that the North Coast community in general might not care and that would be a sad commentary. The destitute who are among us at any time might at any time be any of us, which might be worth remembering. If readers are interested in helping, there are a couple of things you can do. One would be to write or phone your local state representative or Leo Hegstrom, Director of the Oregon Department of Human Resources in Salem. And you can contribute donations of time, money or other resources.

William Newton, who is called "Mitch," is a former clergyman and currently is coordinator of the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project. He can be reached at Clatsop Community Action, 1250 Duane, Astoria. Phone 325-6513.