

Working poor Oregonians pay more in income taxes than poor in other states

As poverty continues to rise in Oregon, a new report published this month said that Oregon remains among a minority of states that tax the income of working poor families and that its tax is among the highest.

In 2010, Oregon income taxes kicked in at \$19,900 for a married couple with two children, about \$2,414 below the poverty line for a family that size, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). Of the 41 states plus the District of Columbia that levy an income tax, only nine states taxed four-person families earning less. The vast majority — 27 of the 42 with income taxes — do not tax the working poor.

“Taxing the work effort of poor families makes it that much harder for them to escape poverty,” said Jason Gettel, policy analyst with the Oregon Center for Public Policy, who reviewed the report. “Those families and our state as a whole would be better off if poor, working families could devote all of their income to putting food on the table, paying for transportation, housing and health care costs and covering other basic needs.”

The report also showed that some working poor Oregon families pay among the highest amounts of income taxes of families anywhere in the country. A two-parent family of four living at the poverty line (\$22,314 in income) had to pay \$234 in

Oregon income taxes in 2010. Only three other states — Alabama, Hawaii and Georgia — would give this family a higher income tax bill.

Near-poor Oregon families fared even worse, according to the report. It noted that an Oregon two-parent family of four with income of 125 percent of the poverty line, or \$27,893, faced a tax bill of \$799 in 2010 — the third highest in the nation, with Alabama and Kentucky being the only states that levied higher income taxes.

The CBPP’s analysis arrives at a time when poverty is on the rise both at the national level and in Oregon. U.S. Census Bureau data released in late September showed that 120,000 more Oregonians lived

below the poverty line in 2010, compared to 2007, before the start of the recession.

According to Gettel, the most effective way for Oregon to eliminate the income tax on poor, working families with children is through an increase in Oregon’s Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is patterned after the federal EITC.

Oregon has an EITC, but it is “too small for the task at hand,” noted Gettel. Oregon’s EITC is 6 percent of the federal tax credit.

Source: The Oregon Center for Public Policy. The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax and economic issues.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Vendor Darren Alexander (NE 15th Avenue and Alberta Street) poses with Mike Rice, the Portland Trail Blazers TV commentator, at the Portland Trail Blazers annual Harvest Dinner on Nov. 1. The day long event serves a hot meal and offers a range of services to people experiencing homelessness and poverty in the region.

Wolves at the zoo

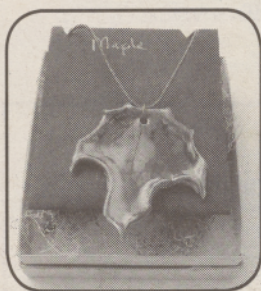
By Jason Wolf

As I approach, my heart pounds for I am near
I am going to see something I love and hold very dear
Through the excitement, I feel my blood coarse through
every vein
I'm getting impatient and it's driving me insane
But the wait is over and I can feel my breath leave
When my eyes make contact, I cannot believe
Three majestic wolves in a place they call home
Unfortunately they are limited to where they roam
I can't help but stare at this magnificent creature
Its ability to survive is an amazing feature
I wish these wolves could tell me their story
Of all their hardships and all their glory
One wolf was black and the other two were gray and white
I only wish I could have stuck around long enough to hear
them howl at night
There was one wolf pacing, seemingly on alert
Were there pups involved that it didn't want anyone to hurt?
I wasn't there long before I had to take myself away
Because if I hadn't I would've been there all day
I felt something strong deep down inside
As I was leaving it felt like a part of me had died

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