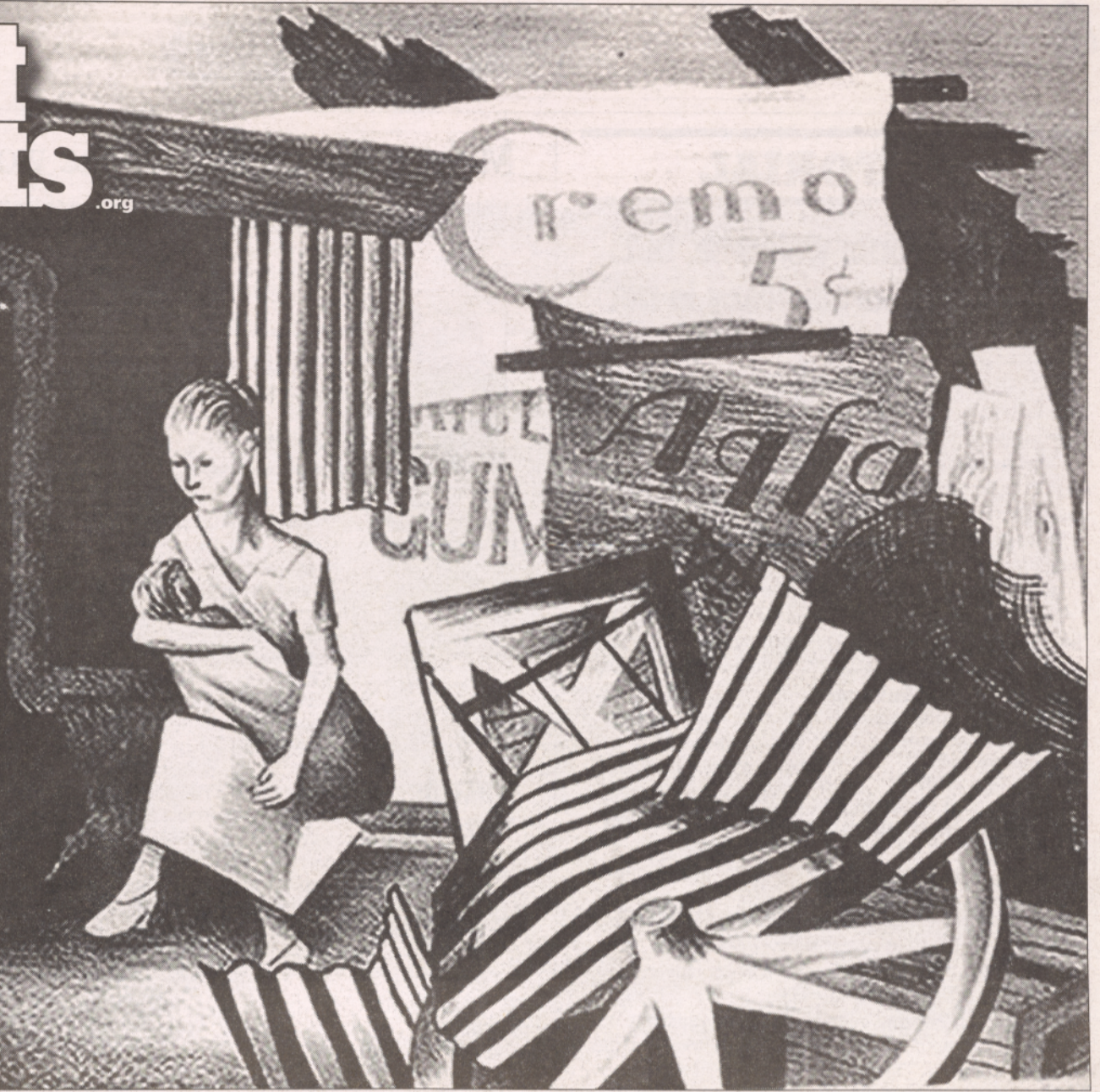


Food as a human right



Home, c 1937, by Paul Weller. Courtesy of Hobos to Street People, a project of WRAP, the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

Cuts to the nation's food stamp program are not just about politics, but the degradation of our youth

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER



Dr. Deborah Frank, founder and principal investigator of Children's HealthWatch

Every few years, when Congress turns its watery eyes toward the nation's subsidy-rich Farm Bill, it chomps hard on the bit that is food stamps. This year was no exception. Between the Democrat plans for \$4 billion over 10 years, and the Republican goal of nearly \$40 billion over the same period, a compromise — at least among lawmakers in D.C. — seems to have been struck. Congress is now shuttling through a 10-year, \$9 billion reduction to the nation's Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP. That's on top of unilateral reductions to the program in November after the 5-year recovery package ran out.

Yes, it's politics. Yes, it's about subsidies and food security. But it's also about human rights, says Dr. Deborah Frank. Frank is the founder and principal investigator of Children's HealthWatch. Frank has researched the cumulative risk factors in children's households, such as food, energy, and housing insecurity and their impact on children's health and development. She comes to the research naturally, as a practicing physician whose clients are primarily families on public insurance or with no insurance at all. She is currently the Director of the Grow Clinic for Children at the Boston Medical Center and is professor of Child Health and Well-Being at Boston University School of Medicine.

She doesn't mince words when it comes to the impact slashing the nation's food safety net will have on the millions of children who rely on it for

"If you're interested in saving health care costs, the dumbest thing you can do is cut nutrition. Food is the cheapest medicine."

their nutrition, and she recently testified to the Senate Agricultural Committee on the consequences of the cuts now hitting the books.

Joanne Zuhl: Regarding the impact on children, what do you know that you want lawmakers to understand?

Dr. Deborah Frank: That hunger is a health issue for everybody, particularly for children, starting during gestation. If the mother is hungry during pregnancy, the child will be smaller and sicker and the effects go on throughout life.

Early childhood is when the baby's brain is going to increase two and a half times — two-thirds of the adult size — with adequate nourishment. Nutrition is the building block of the brain. Nutrition is an essential part of our immune system. Humans who are malnourished are more susceptible to infection and they stay sicker longer. And often they are left underweight by the infection and catch the next infection. Which is why we see such a tight connection between children's nutrition and hospitalization.

It's been calculated that a \$20 billion cut in

See **FOOD**, page 4

Multnomah County mulls fall-out from SNAP cuts

This past month, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners heard testimony from food stamp recipients about the potentially devastating impact of cuts to the federal program. More than 20 percent of Multnomah County residents rely on the program to supplement their nutrition through hard times.

Now those residents will have to deal with Congress' decision to shave \$9 billion from its budget over the next 10 years, much in the form of assistance to families. These cuts come on top of the across-the-board reduction in benefits in November as a result of the expiration of the 2009 stimulus package.

In Oregon, about 800,000 individuals — one in five Oregonians — are on food stamps, totaling \$1.2 billion in assistance. As such, Oregon has one of the highest rates of food stamp use in the nation, a residual effect of the lingering economic slump that means more people working fewer hours at lower wages. On average, SNAP benefits pay about \$1.40 per meal.

See **MULTNOMAH**, page 4

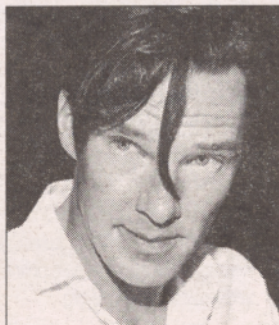
Inside



The other corner office

A talk with City Auditor LaVonne Griffin-Valade

Page 3



Benedict Cumberbatch

Sherlock Holme's alter ego talks career, childhood and the big screen

Page 8



Vendor profile

Sean and Rebecca: Downtown's dynamic duo

Page 6