

# Which ballot measure helps children more?

**"Kids First" attacks children's programs and Higher Education; SAFE initiative maintains public funding**

Don't be misled: the so-called "Education First" Initiative, also called "Kids First," raises no new money for schools.

Instead, as leaders of organizations representing tens of thousands of Oregonians recognize, it takes away money — by the millions — for other services which support children and help educate our youth.

The initiative was recently given the go-ahead by the state Supreme Court. Its principal

backer is the Oregon Education Association — whose members will be augmented by paid signature gatherers in an attempt to get more than 89,000 signatures on petitions before July 8.

From a practical standpoint, the effort that OEA puts into the "Kids First" Initiative will hurt the campaign to defeat the Tiernan/Sizemore (PERS) Initiative.

"OPEU and other public employee unions joined with OEA in the PERS Coalition to fight the threats to our retirement," said OPEU/SEIU Local 503 President Dawn Morgan. "OEA's approach with Education First will jeopardize our efforts in this coalition struggle and hurt social services and Higher Education that help young and old alike."

This initiative, if it makes it on the November 8 ballot and is approved by the voters, diverts funding from care for the mentally ill, from children's services, from assistance to the disabled, from senior services, from the courts, and other services — creating more problems than it solves.

It doesn't even put all of education first. It leaves out Oregon's four-year colleges and universities.

"When we talk about funding for education, we need to include higher education in that discussion," said Robert Nosse of the Oregon Student Lobby. "Funding kindergarten through 12th grade and

community colleges to the detriment of higher education and other state services is not fair nor is it the best solution for Oregon."

The initiative requires elementary and secondary schools and

Effects on State General Fund		
	Ed First	SAFE
New Revenue	0	\$1.5 billion
Cuts needed to balance budget for:		
- K-14 schools	0	0
- All other programs	-27%	0

community colleges to receive funding at no less than they are in this biennium. That amount must then be increased for inflation and enrollment changes, while funding for all other General Fund programs would be forced to lower and lower levels.

The state's General Fund faces a shortfall of 14% in 1993-95, but the Education First Initiative would almost double this deficit for state programs — to an astounding 27%. A deficit of this magnitude would cost at least 4,700 state jobs.

Many groups oppose this approach to funding public services. As important as education is, they recognize that Oregon has many people who need support — and that children often need support outside the classroom in order to succeed with their studies.

"The Education First Initiative is bad public policy," said Charles Vars of the League of Oregon Cities. "Our children need good education, safe communities, adequate housing, and human services. The League of Oregon Cities cannot support an approach to redistribute inadequate resources and thereby limit critical services."

"Funding education at the expense of human services will not help bring about the future that we envision for our children," said Alice Pickard of United Seniors of Oregon. "Students cannot learn if they

## SAFE initiative helps children including state programs for them

There is a better way to fund schools without devastating other public programs supported by the state General Fund.

This initiative, called Solid Approach to Funding Education (SAFE), also sets support for schools at 1993-95 levels, but does it from property taxes rather than allowing 1990's Measure 5 to become fully implemented and making up the difference from the state General Fund, as the Education First measure would.

The difference to the state General Fund is \$1.5 million which costs state General Fund support to programs for human services, higher education — an *educational* program that would be further devastated by the Education First initiative — and corrections.

This initiative is sponsored by county commissioners from eastern Oregon — a part of the state that generally did not support Measure 5 in 1990.

Specifically, what the measure would do is stop the reduction in property taxes required by 1990's Measure 5 at this year's level, at \$10 instead of dropping down to \$5 per thousand of valuation.

Although 1990's Ballot Measure 5 requires the state General Fund to replace money to schools lost by the measure only through 1995-96, this measure would make that duty permanent. Thus, the continued erosion of public support for schools would be halted.

At the same time, state government budgets — at a cost of thousands of jobs and hundreds of programs, many geared toward children and families — would not be eviscerated.

are homeless, hungry, or caring for disabled or senior relatives as a result of human services budget cuts."

"Ironically, the Education First Initiative will mean very deep cuts must be made in human services," said Robert Cantine of the Association of Oregon Counties. "This will harm the very children who need help so they can be ready to learn. Instead of this approach, we should be seeking common effort between schools and human services to insure that all the needs of all children are 'first'."

This "Me First" approach by OEA divides the people and organizations who came together in 1990 in the Heart of Oregon Coalition because we recognized that we needed to work together to protect public services. OEA was one of the public employee unions that formed the PERS Coalition to fight raids on the PERS fund and is now battling the Tiernan/Sizemore Initiative.

"The forces attacking any one of us — teachers, public employees, or health care providers — are really attacking us all," said Ellen Lowe of the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. "The Education First Initiative gives our opponents a wedge to divide us one from the other. We ought to be working together to build understanding of the interdependence of our spheres of interest that together form community."

"You will recognize us and the organizations with whom we are associated as partners in seeking tax reform and public policy strategies that build community and reinforce civility," Gerald J. Bieberle, of the Human Services Coalition of Oregon, said in a letter to OEA President Bruce Adams and Executive Director Bob Crumpton. "The 'stand with us' theme has been a long-guiding principle for us. We view the Education First Initiative as a disruption of this partnership."