



Washington Hotline

by Congressman Ron Wyden

Q. The Health and Environment Subcommittee on which you sit this week voted out a weakened version of the Clean Air Act. How do you feel about the bill as approved by subcommittee?

A. I'm very disappointed—and concerned. The bill passed by the subcommittee weakens pollution control requirements for stationary and mobile sources, allows emissions from automobile tailpipes to double, and extends to 1993 the deadline for meeting health standards.

The health implications of this action are serious—particularly for the elderly. Study after study has shown the serious health problems that can result from polluted air: difficult, labored breathing, increased susceptibility to respiratory infections, development of chronic

lung disease and/or exacerbation of existing heart or lung disease. Seniors, including the 65,502 elderly living in Multnomah County, are among the groups most likely to experience these problems.

I feel very strongly that we owe it to our senior citizens to maintain good air quality—and that the only way we can hope to achieve this end is by supporting a strong Clean Air Act.

We hear so much in Washington these days about the bottom line. The human bottom line under the subcommittee's rewrite of the Clean Air Act is that the health of our elderly is being traded to Detroit for a paltry sum.

Q. The House Aging Committee, on which you sit, just released a study about fraud and abuse under the Medicaid program. What does that study show nationwide—and

here in Oregon?

A. According to the study, states have failed to crack down on Medicaid fraud and abuse, at a cost to U.S. taxpayers of \$2 billion annually. It is no coincidence that this total represents approximately the same amount of money that the Administration has proposed cutting from the Medicaid budget in 1983.

Regrettably, Oregon is one of the biggest offenders. There have been only five convictions of Medicaid providers in the state since the program began in 1965. The state did not even employ a full-time fraud and abuse investigator until 1979.

States have a number of reasons for being lax in investigating fraud and abuse. Court proceedings are expensive and time-consuming. Many fear that exposure of fraud will turn public sentiment against

Medicaid.

I believe there are answers to both of these concerns. Rather than turning the public against Medicaid, I believe that exposure and prosecution of fraud will reassure taxpayers that money spent is spent wisely—and for what it was intended.

Furthermore, I believe states can avoid the more costly court actions by pursuing stiffer administrative penalties, such as suspension of Medicaid providers.

The goal in running Medicaid should be to get the maximum number of health care dollars to people who need the care. Until we do that, Medicaid will continue to be a target for the budget ax—and the truly needy will be denied the care they need and deserve.



From the Boardroom

by Gladys McCoy, County Commissioner

It's budget time once again for Multnomah County—a difficult time, indeed. With Federal and State budget cuts remaining unresolved, along with a depressed State economy, financial decision making at the local level becomes even more difficult.

An assessment of the general financial condition of Multnomah County was made by its Fiscal Status Task Force. Rather than make sweeping changes in the County's fiscal approach at this time, the Task Force recommended the continued attempt to make small gains whenever possible while the larger picture is still unsettled. The Task Force focuses mainly on the recommendations that can be implemented in the 1982-83 budget. It was felt that the measured revenue increases or expenditure reductions was the approach to be taken by the Task Force for making recommendations.

The Task Force issued its report to the County on March 12, 1982, making both short-term and long-term recommendations. A meeting has been scheduled in District 2 for Thursday, April 1, 1982, 5:30 pm, until 7 pm, Neighbors North Office,

7508 N. Hereford, Portland, OR. The public is invited to participate in a discussion of the Task Force Report. This discussion will focus on the recommendations for the County. Some of the short-term recommendations are: restriction on departmental expenditure levels; efficiency cuts, attrition, program reductions and consolidation of functions should be used as methods of reducing baseline expenditures; personnel costs, in terms of both salaries and fringe benefits, must reflect the constrained economic situation the County faces; increased efforts to find innovative ways of providing employee benefits at reduced cost, especially in the area of health care, should be encouraged; and, that a \$2.00 annual library card fee be established for Multnomah County Residents, and that fees for out-of-county residents be increased to \$30 annually.

Some of the long-term recommendations pertain to the following: issues regarding urban subsidy; voter approval of a new property tax base for Multnomah County; and, development of County properties for the purpose of generating revenue for operating expenses and

enhancing the value of the land, namely, the County Farm and the Hoyt Hotel.

If you wish to discuss the Fiscal Task Force's recommendations or anything else about the County budget, please feel free to stop by and chat. Multnomah County faces increased demands for services as Oregon's economy continues to worsen. Public input is vital to the decision-making budgetary process. In addition to the above meeting on the Fiscal Task Force Report, the 1982-83 budget hearings begin in April. All meetings will be held in Room 602, Multnomah County Courthouse.

Please request a Budget Hearings schedule from the Clerk of the Board, phone, 248-3277. Your participation at the Task Force meeting gives you a general scope of the County's financial status. It also prepares you to better understand the County's budget process. Please plan to attend as many of the meetings as possible. I would like my constituents to be informed about the County's financial capabilities. I urge you to become involved in the budget hearings, share your concerns, and make recommendations.

Property tax relief deadline nears

(Continued from page 1 column 3)
grams are available at Assessment and Taxation headquarters, 319 SW Washington, Portland, 97204.

HARRP forms are available at many banks, post offices and Oregon Department of Revenue offices.

Applicants for the Property Tax Relief Program should note that the Oregon Legislature has reduced the maximum award from \$425 to \$287.50. The program is designed to pay as much as 30 per cent of property taxes, but individuals may find

the percentage varies based on the taxing district, the proportion of A and B ballots and bonded indebtedness.

Persons with questions about the program may call 248-3221. Some special filing requirements apply to persons who purchased homes after January, 1982, and to persons holding a life estate.

Applicants should also note that the program remains in effect until the property is sold or the owner moves. Homeowners who move

their place of residence must notify the County or face a penalty.

The Veterans Exemption Program exempts part of the value of the home from taxation if the owner is certified disabled. The Senior Citizens Property Tax Deferral Program defers payment of taxes until the owner dies or sells the property. Persons must be 62 years old by March 1 of the year filing. There is no personal gross income requirement.

Information for these two programs may be obtained at 248-3347.

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These important Dimensions are:

- (1) The Dimension of mental and physical **HEALTH**.
- (2) The Dimension of **FRIENDS** and friendly relationships with others.
- (3) The Dimension of a place to live called **HOME**, the place in which you have an absolute right to be.
- (4) The Dimension of **MONEY**, or some form of a medium of exchange, something that you own other than yourself.

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