

Opinion

Don't forget to vote!

Your voted ballot must be returned (postmarks do not count) to your county elections office by election day, Tuesday, May 16.

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No more limits on food stamps

BY MICHAEL LEACHMAN
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On December 1, 1996, the food stamp program in Oregon changed dramatically. Federal law imposed new limits on the amount of food stamps many low-income Oregonians could receive. As of that date, adults between the ages of 18 and 50 who had no dependents living with them, could get food stamps for only three months out of the three-year period if they were under or unemployed. Thousands of under- and unemployed Oregonians immediately started to lose food stamps. In the eight months after the harsh three-month time limits started, the food stamp rolls among those facing the limits declined by 40 percent, from 30,996 to 18,716. By November 1999, at the end of the first three years under the new system, the number of able-bodied adults without dependents receiving food stamps in Oregon stood at 50 percent of pre-welfare reform levels. What happened to all of those people? The Oregon Food Bank knows. From 1996 to 1999, as food stamp caseloads plummeted, the number of Oregonians receiving emergency food boxes grew about 18 percent. The U.S. Department of Agriculture also has an idea. USDA's national study of hunger in 1996 through 1998 concluded that Oregon had the highest hunger rate in the country. Nearly six percent of all Oregon households, according to the USDA, were going hungry because they did not have the money to put enough food on the table. In the meantime, the state Department of Human Services (DHS) might have effectively removed the limits for many Oregonians by piecing together waivers and exemptions the federal government provides. In fact, by the beginning of this year, Oregon had accumulated to a huge stockpile of exemptions (over 50,000 case-months), since DHS used so few of them over previous years. In addition, 30 of Oregon's 36 counties qualified for waivers from the three-month time limit. Oregon had hoarded enough exemptions, when coupled with waivers in those 30 counties, effectively to end the three-month limit in the state. Faced with rising pressure from anti-hunger groups and organizations, DHS finally changed course. As of May 1, Oregon will no longer cut under- and unemployed people off of food stamps after three months; however, food stamp recipients will still face work requirements. The next step will be letting people know about the change in policy. Oregonians have heard for over three years now that the hunger safety net is no longer as strong as it once was. Many have turned to emergency food in inadequate supply. Others have skipped meals or reduced the nutritional value of their diet by cutting costs. This is the sort of thing that should not happen in Oregon, especially in such healthy economic times. It is up to all of us to help spread the word—the old food stamp time limit has changed. More people can get help. This is something our friends and neighbors need to know. This is something our churches, temples, and social service agencies need to be telling those who come for assistance. Several community organizations and anti-hunger groups are working to assure that DHS pursues an effective outreach plan, but they need your help. As citizens in the nation's most hungry state, we have a special responsibility to spread the word and to maximize the federal food stamp dollars sent to Oregon.

Statement of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. on Juvenile Justice System Racial Disparities Report

"The criminal justice system is like a long dark corridor. At its end is not a ray of light, but a lengthy incarceration and ruined lives," says Jackson.

Reverend Jesse Jackson, founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, released the following statement regarding a currently released juvenile justice study titled "And Justice for Some."

"The results of a comprehensive study on the juvenile justice system in America, sponsored by the Justice Department and the Youth Law Center, are both alarming and telling," says Jackson. "The report found that minority youth are cumulatively disadvantaged at every step of the juvenile justice system; from arrest, to charging standards, to detainment in jail, to ultimate sentencing. Black youths are six times more likely to be sentenced to juvenile prison than their white counterparts. "An even more staggering disparity is demonstrated when comparing drug-related offenses and outcomes. According to the study, black teenagers are 48 times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prisons when arrested for a drug charge. "This report is another example of 'zero tolerance' for our minority youth. These practices, whether it be racial profiling or the even more onerous rash of police shootings, are long standing and go to the very essence

of racism. "Yet rather than work towards a solution to these injustices, politicians continue to further perpetuate these inequities on a state by state, and even nationally, by passing more extreme measures under the guise of getting 'tough on crime.' As a result, more and more of our children are being tried as adults, subjected to brutal treatment in adult facilities, and even eligible for the death penalty in many states. "The criminal justice system is like a long dark corridor. At its end is not a ray of light, but lengthy incarceration and ruined lives. There are many exits from the system: pre-trial diversion, first offender treatment, probation, intensive supervision, half-way house and alternatives to incarceration. But the study seems to bear out our anecdotal experience that the keys to these less punishing exits are power, money, or even the color of one's skin. This is not fair. "It is time to stop manipulating the public into believing these arcane and bloodthirsty practices are necessary. Violent crime is down nationwide. A comprehensive overhaul of our juvenile justice system is long overdue. It is time for serious reflection and critical self-examination. Let us follow in the best traditions of Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Cesar Chavez and focus our energies on lifting up our youth rather than locking them up."

"Trust juries not politicians coalition" unveils television commercial urging "no" vote on constitutional amendment 81

Oregonians who have served on civil juries—your friends and neighbors—spoke out about preserving our most basic rights to a trial by jury. Constitutional Amendment 81 would crush those rights. The group unveiled a campaign commercial that echoes that theme. As a juror, I was in awe of my responsibility to hear all the evidence in a month-long trial and make a very difficult decision. We held a hospital accountable for its mistakes and sent a message to all large medical businesses to not forget us, the customers, the patients. Juries are the target of the campaign to pass Constitutional Amendment 81. The measure, referred to the ballot by the Legislature, would take the power that now sits in the hands of citizen juries and places it in the hands of politicians and legislators. The

don't like what they can't control, and they can't control juries. Once you give up a basic right, it's very hard to get it back. Citizen juries are a powerful tool to hold irresponsible businesses accountable. Please join me in voting "No" on Constitutional Amendment 81. -Anne Hughes, Portland restaurant owner and jury foreman Constitutional Amendment 81 will take away the most basic right Oregonian possess—the right to complete and impartial justice on a case-by-case basis from a jury of our peers. Measure 81 will appear on the May 16, 2000 Primary ballot and is backed by the insurance industry, HMOs and mega-corporations like the tobacco industry. We trust our juries to find truth to decide who's at fault... What to repay

accountable... Under Measure 81, we lose that. According to the Supreme Court ruling on the Certified Ballot Title to Measure 81 (Love v. Myers): "Under the Oregon Constitution, the right to jury trial restricts the legislature's authority to limit recovery of some kinds of damages in some civil actions. This measure overrides that restriction by adding a new constitutional provision expressly allowing the legislature to impose limits on damages that may be recovered in any civil action." It's a constitutional amendment that takes power from juries and gives it to politicians. Under measure 81, we give up every true of case by case justice. Passage of Measure 81 would allow the Legislature to put a set limit on the amount a jury may assess in a civil



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