



Opinion

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Sweeping Cuts Weaken Services to the Vulnerable

Available resources, including the Kicker, are available today to address the state's needs without putting programs at risk

Hello, my name is Virginia Robertson, and I am the President of the Board of Directors of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of 17 Christian denominations comprising some 1,300 congregations. We work with regional

ecumenical and interfaith organizations throughout the state.

The Campaign for Fairness is an ecumenical concern and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon urges board support of campaign's goals from communities of faith across the state. Our support is rooted in our his-

tory of almost 100 years of ecumenical witness in support of the most vulnerable in our society. What brings us to the table today is our strong sense that the proposed state budget cuts affect everyone in Oregon.

They affect our families, our congregations, children in our schools,

working parents and many others among us. In the coming weeks, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon will encourage the broadest possible response to these sweeping cuts.

We will encourage all Oregonians who seek a fair government to be in this campaign.

Those who support the Campaign for Fairness understand that the resources to stem these budget cuts are available today without putting other state programs at risk.

We call on our elected representatives to use existing revenues, in-

cluding the kicker, to address the real needs of Oregonians.

Although we acknowledge that the apportionments we seek will not meet all of the needs of vulnerable Oregonians who are hungry, or temporarily unemployed or without shelter, or unable to afford safe childcare, we are compelled to ask the state to at least restore the cuts proposed in this budget.

The projected kicker alone is more than sufficient to address these critical needs at the levels identified by the campaign.

Taking a Stand for the Voiceless and Powerless

By Rev. Ronald L. Williams
Pastor Bethel A.M.E. Church

People of faith have given support across denominational lines to Campaign for Fairness.

We have united to be a strong voice for voiceless and powerless people. We are standing together to speak for families and children who already struggle

with financial decisions and cannot bear the burden of unfair cuts in programs and services they depend on to make their lives better. In his brief State of the State comments at the beginning of Legislative session, Gov. Kitzhaber said, "We have hard decisions to make and we must make budget cuts." The State

Legislators must hear the voice of the people of faith in the state of Oregon saying, although cuts must be made, people already in crisis are not the ones who should receive the negative end of the sharp budget ax.

It is unfair to ask families and children already trapped in poverty to make it without programs

and services they have come to depend on. It is unfair to ask the people with the lowest income in the state to pay the tax break of those with the highest income.

It is unfair to find a way to protect bridges, roads and trees but not find a way to protect homeless and hurting people.

Be fair and let the budget tax fall

where it will do the least harm. Be fair and let those who benefited from past fiscal decisions now bear the burden of present decisions.

Be fair and protect the most vulnerable people in our state.

Jesus said, "In as much as you done it unto the least of these you have done it unto me."

Smith Applauds Passage of Budget

Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore. hailed Thursday's passage of the budget as a victory for working Oregonians, particularly those with families.

The budget cuts taxes by \$1.35 trillion while increasing funds for education, natural resource protection, and health coverage. The budget will also reduce our national debt and protect every penny of Social Security and Medicare. "This budget means that working Oregonians will not only be left with more money in their pockets at the end of the month, but that their families will benefit from better schools, cleaner water and air, and more accessible health care," said Smith. "This budget re-stacks the deck in favor of those who play by the rules, work hard, and want only to provide for their families. It also protects our seniors who have paid their dues and now want a secure retirement."

The final budget also includes a provision written by Smith that will provide \$28 billion over the next three years to help working families obtain

health insurance. This is in addition to the \$70 billion in refundable tax credits for the purchase of health insurance that were included in the president's budget. "We need to care for those in our country who, try as they might, cannot afford health care coverage for themselves or their families," said Smith. "Health care coverage for low-income workers can be done in a way that will promote state flexibility, avoid new bureaucracies, and protect the employer-based coverage system while providing health care coverage to millions of Americans who live in fear of getting sick or injured."

Smith said the budget also provides nearly \$80 billion in additional assistance to farmers and ranchers; \$300 billion for expansion of Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits; earmarks nearly \$8 billion to expand Medicaid benefits to children with special needs; increases spending for IDEA, a program which aids disabled students by \$1.25 billion and provides \$2.6 billion for teacher quality training.

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