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Helping Mothers Raise Good Kids

By MICHAEL LEACHMAN

In Oregon and the rest of the United States, public policies that support mothers have not kept up with changes in the economy. We have fallen behind other developed nations in this regard, and our mothers and children are feeling the results.

From the moment they become mothers, too many women in Oregon are forced to choose paid work over the care and nurturing of their children.

Oregon guarantees only unpaid leave, forcing moms who can't afford to live on their savings, or whose partners don't make enough income alone, to go back to work shortly after childbirth.

New moms working for small businesses and some working in part-time jobs are promised no leave at all. The exceedingly poor women who receive cash assistance from the State must begin work activities and put their infants in expensive infant childcare 90 days after giving birth.

*'Oregon's single moms have it the worst; about one in three can't always be sure they'll be able to pay for the family's next meal,'*  
— Michael Leachman, Oregon Center for Public Policy

For those fortunate enough to qualify for it, the right to unpaid leave has become less attractive as an employee benefit as families increasingly need the mother's income just to meet their basic needs.

Oregon's jobs pay less than they did twenty years ago. As a result, even though employed women in Oregon are typically working 211 more hours outside the home than they were 20 years ago, their families have not made any real income gains.

The proliferation of low-pay jobs has taken away the gains families expected when mothers joined the paid workforce. At the same time, housing and other costs have increased.

Over the 1990s, single-family home prices rose about twice as fast as household incomes in Oregon. The average cost of childcare increased 44 percent from 1984 to 1995, and has continued to rise.

The result: the typical Oregon family is squeezed more for money and time.

Our mothers are especially stressed, since mothers still bear the bulk of homemaking chores. Oregon's single moms have it the

worst; about one in three can't always be sure they'll be able to pay for the family's next meal.

If that weren't enough, the situation may be getting worse. In an economic downturn, mothers will be turning to a safety net that is no longer designed to catch them, despite all their work. Thanks to welfare reform, Oregon now gets only a set amount of money from the federal government to support very poor mothers who can't find work.

When the economy sours and the need for assistance to families with children rises, Oregon will have to dig into its own budget or refuse to help those in need.

Moreover, the outdated unemployment insurance program denies benefits to many mothers who can only work part-time.

Oregon mothers need to be better protected from financial disaster when their children get sick, when they have a baby, or when they lose their jobs in a recession. It's time for Oregon to catch up with the economy of the 21st century.

Michael Leachman is a policy analyst with the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

Praising the 'Flight For Freedom'

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. honored the Oregon organizers and participants in the "Flight for Freedom" to New York City with a statement on the floor of the United States Senate. Following is a transcript of Sen. Wyden's remarks:

"This weekend a number of strong-willed people of my state are mounting an operation they call 'Flight for Freedom,' answering the national call for all of us to get on with their lives and come to the aid of those hurt in the attacks of September 11.

"In a show of solidarity with their fellow Americans, more than 700 Oregonians are making a statement to the nation this weekend by heading to the hotels, Broadway shows, and restaurants in New York City that are fighting for economic survival in the aftermath of the attacks. Oregon's Flight for Freedom, with the people of my state standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the citizens of New York, is an effort to make clear that no terrorist can break the American spirit.

"I want to congratulate Sho

Dozono and the other organizers and participate in Oregon's Flight for Freedom for their generous efforts.

I urge all Americans to follow their example. Oregonians are showing this weekend that we're going to stand against terrorism by reaching out to their fellow citizens and enjoying what American life has to offer in our centers of commerce all across this great nation. Because of these kinds of efforts, we can send a message that terrorists can't extinguish the American spirit."

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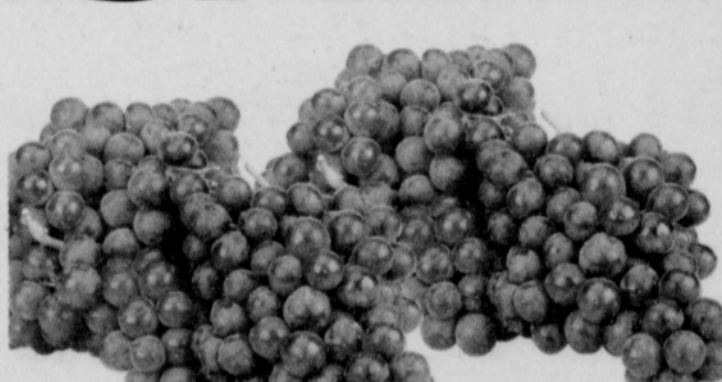
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