

OPINION

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Seniors, Disabled at Grave Risk

If state does not raise revenues, life-sustaining services will end

BY DON BUTSCH

The Governor's Commission on Senior Services finds it hard to be joyful as the New Year approaches when we know tens of thousands of seniors and people with disabilities are gravely at risk because of the state's budget crisis.

If the state does not raise revenues, these frail seniors and people with disabilities will lose critical, life-sustaining services. These are people who cannot bathe themselves, cannot shop or cook, cannot walk without assistance or must use a wheelchair. Many cannot even feed themselves or use the bathroom without substantial help.

Many are isolated, without friends or family to depend upon. These individuals are among the poorest of the poor in Oregon. They have had to survive on meager incomes or have spent down all of their hard-earned savings, and have

nowhere left to turn except to the state.

Without Medicaid payments, nursing homes and other care facilities will be forced to move needy residents out of their facilities.

Thousands of caregivers who help seniors and people with disabilities in their own home will lose their jobs. This only deepens Oregon's recession and will delay any recovery.

—Don Butsch, chair of the Governor's Commission on Senior Services

Many of these seniors and people with disabilities will have nowhere to go. Even worse for the state's economy is that for every two dollars we cut from programs that serve seniors and people with disabilities we lose an additional three dollars from the federal government. Facilities will need to lay off staff, creating a horrible ripple effect on the rest of the community and the

economy. Thousands of caregivers who help seniors and people with disabilities in their own home will lose their jobs. This only deepens Oregon's recession and will delay any recovery.

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—Don Butsch, chair of the Governor's Commission on Senior Services

We are not the little boy crying wolf. These dire predictions are true. Not a single county will be spared the impact of these catastrophic cuts. For example, in Multnomah County 3,976 seniors and people with disabilities who need help every single day will be eliminated from services. This equals 53 percent of the Department of Human Services' current senior and disabled clients

in this county. Other critical impacts due to the proposed budget cuts include: Elimination of critical mental health services to 10,400 individuals; Reducing payments to foster homes which care for abused and neglected children, Curtailing services that help welfare families find jobs.

The Oregon Legislature, over five special sessions, required the cutting of these critical services rather than developing new revenue sources. Many of these cuts are scheduled to start on Feb. 1.

We urge Oregonians to contact your legislators to say how you feel about these distressing cuts and to urge them to solve the state's budget problems before these cuts become a reality. We must do something before it is too late.

Don Butsch is chair of the Governor's Commission on Senior Services, a 21-member official advisory body on senior issues.

Support Wyden-Hatch Health Care Act

Setting health care priorities and mandating a vote makes sense

The American Association of Retired Persons, the AFL-CIO and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce support the Health Care that Works for All Americans Act, written by Senators Ron Wyden, D-Ore. and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

The Wyden-Hatch proposal calls for a national discussion of health care priorities and mandates a Congressional vote on health care legislation that springs from the recommendations of the American people.

In accepting the endorsement, Wyden said, "After years of health care reform proposals from Washington, D.C. that die without Congressional action, it's time for a fresh approach to creating a health care system that can serve all Americans. By providing the public an opportunity to participate, with a guarantee that it will be quickly followed up by Congressional votes, Congress can break the gridlock. The Chamber, the AFL-CIO and AARP are an extraordinary coalition that has come together to support this unique, carefully structured roadmap to real reform."

The Health Care that Works for All Americans Act is designed to help the citizens of this country face the realities of the health care

system and improve it by allowing regular Americans to discuss the kind of health care system they want, decide the best ways to contain cost and improve care and require Congress to deliver a plan that works for everyone. AARP, AFL-CIO and the U.S. Chamber noted the proposal's two main components -- public participation and a guaranteed vote in Congress -- in their statement of support.

After the American people have had the opportunity to participate directly in this process and the working group [established by the Act] has compiled its recommendations, the Wyden-Hatch bill provides a guarantee that Congress will consider the proposals.

The United States spends approximately 15 percent of its gross domestic product on health care. This country spent \$1.4 trillion on health care in the year 2001 -- a 10 percent increase from the previous year. Health insurance costs have risen sharply, making health coverage harder to get and harder to keep for millions of Americans.

The Wyden-Hatch proposal is built around the idea that the questions of what constitutes effective health care and how that care should be financed should not be avoided

any longer.

"I believe that at the end of the day, only the citizens of this country can make the fundamental choices that affect their health and their well-being -- and health and well-being of the society in which

they live," said Wyden. "What Senator Hatch and I want to guarantee is that their voices will be heard -- and that this Congress will act, with a mandatory vote in both houses -- to make the people's vision for health care come to pass."

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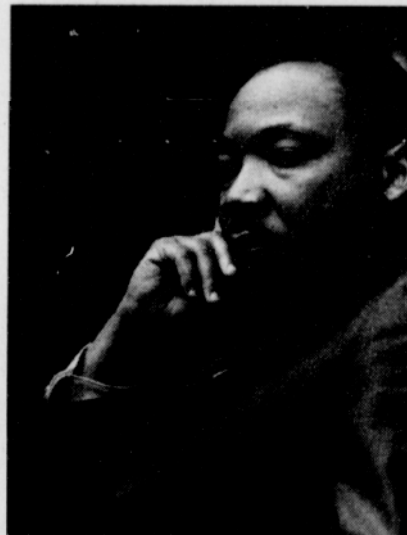
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Letter to the Editor: The Truth about PERS

The Oregonian is on a crusade, working with the business community, to destroy the PERS system.

The public needs a place to see the truths about the importance of this basically sound system that allows older workers to retire. PERS makes a decent life possible for many older people of color and women since civil service protections against discrimination allows more to succeed in a career in public service.

The PERS shortfall is being used by public employers and corporate heads to shout "The sky is falling." What they should be saying is that the system is funded securely for years to come.

There is a future shortfall that needs to be dealt with. But those who always want to get their hands on working people's money are beating a drum about future shortfalls of \$57 billion that may be due to a computer glitch because the experts can't explain the result. The actual future shortfall is due,

in addition to a bull market, to Measure 5, which cut corporate taxes. Before the 1990 measure, taxes were split 50-50 between working people and corporations. In 2002, according to the Legislative Revenue Office, the split is now an outrageous 70 percent burden for workers and 30 percent for big business.

This is a question of trying to rob public employees pockets to make up for corporate grand theft.

The shortfalls in schools and public services are not due to PERS, but to the woefully inadequate taxes that big business pays.

We need to raise corporate taxes to fully fund our public services and begin a retirement system for all Oregonians. I'd like to see The Oregonian and other media get behind an issue that really serves Oregonians and not just a few business types like the Cascade Policy Institute big business think tank.

Adrienne Weller,
North Portland